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5 CENTS.

# WIDE AWAKE

A COMPLETE STORY **WEEKLY**. EVERY WEEK.

**LIVING IN HIS HAT;**  
OR, THE WIDE WORLD HIS HOME. *By EDWARD N. FOX.*



"Yer will stop us, will yer?" snarled the Yeggman angrily, and he rushed at the boy with the club raised in his left hand. His companion ran to his assistance. Joe was alarmed, for he realized that he was no match for them.



# WIDE AWAKE WEEKLY

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## LIVING IN HIS HAT

OR,

## THE WIDE WORLD HIS HOME

By EDWARD N. FOX

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE ONLY ONE OF HIS KIND IN THE WORLD.

"Somehow, you give the impression of being a pretty mean pair of rascals!"

Joe Borden uttered that judgment under his breath, after having taken the time to study his two men.

The boy, who appeared to be about seventeen, and sprucely dressed, sat near the open doorway of a second-rate hotel.

Just outside stood the two men whom he was covertly watching.

To the best of his knowledge Joe had never seen them before, yet they interested him.

One was tall, rather slender, yet with a frame that suggested a good deal of strength.

This individual attempted to dress "like a gentleman." If he failed at all in looking the part it was merely because his dark face, the black, restless eyes, and a certain hang of the thin, sallow cheeks gave an impression that did not altogether make for confidence.

This tall man was plainly cold-blooded, silent at most times, suspicious, and——

"Treacherous!" Joe concluded, bluntly. "A good man to keep away from. He makes me think of that Englishman, Mallory, that I ran afoul of in Singapore. Now, that other chap is more like the coward, Grashy, that I thumped in Hong Kong."

From which one would infer that Joe, young as he was, must have seen many parts of the far, wide world.

That indeed was the case.

Now Joe sized up the smaller man, whom he had just likened to a coward of his past acquaintance.

This smaller man, while he made some evident effort to appear like a gentleman, had yet about him the beginning of seediness.

His black derby, not too carefully brushed, looked as if it had once seen somewhat better days.

Like his taller comrade, this shorter man wore a black frock suit, but the shorter man's clothes were just beginning to show whitish at the seams.

If these two strangers had any business together, then it was plain that the taller man was the one who would direct that business.

Joe had not heard all they said, for the pair stood just beyond the door, on the sidewalk, talking in low, earnest tones.

But now this much our hero heard:

"Beth Bronson, for all her sweet face, can put up the dickens of a fight when she gets enraged."

"What?" leered the taller man. "When we have the information, too, and can go ahead without her knowing? And besides, when we have such an ally as we have?"

"Scoundrelism, of course," clicked Joe, and strained his ears.

The taller man held up in one hand a small slip of paper, adding to his last remark:



"This, which you were so fortunate as to get, gives us the key to the whole situation."

"Yes, if Beth Bronson does not start ahead of us."

The tall man looked around suspiciously, but Joe Borden, with his soft hat pulled over his eyes, was leaning back in the hotel chair, his lips parted, and his breath coming as in a minor, subdued snore.

Satisfied that the boy, who could have no interest in their affairs anyway, was not listening nor likely to overhear, the taller man turned to his comrade.

Now a slit of one of Joe's eyes opened in a second.

He was just in time to see the tall man thrusting a slip of paper into a vest pocket.

At least that was what the tall man thought he was doing.

But instead the slip fell, then was caught by the fall breeze and blown straight into the hotel lobby.

It fluttered to the tiled floor at Joe's feet.

Sitting up, rubbing his eyes and yawning, Joe Borden moved one foot noiselessly so that it covered the slip.

Then, moving with slight restlessness, Joe contrived to drop his soft hat close to his feet.

He bent. When he straightened up again, with his hat, the piece of paper was inside the hat.

"Same trick I worked on that greaser at Durango, Mexico," smiled Joe inwardly. "Wonder if this thing will be as big with results?"

Again settling back in the chair, he dropped his hat over his eyes, prepared to hear more. But—

"I'm dry," complained the shorter man, in a husky voice. "Come in and have a drink."

"I never drink at public bars," replied the taller man, coldly. "It would be well if you followed the same plan, Stokes. Your head would be less fuddled at times."

"I'm going in," insisted the shorter man, stubbornly.

"Then I'll go along too, to see that you don't take too much," observed the taller man.

They passed through the lobby, vanishing in the direction of the bar.

Joe stepped slowly to the new-stand in the lobby dropping a coin and picking up a newspaper.

"Fine dresser, that tall man," he remarked to the young lady behind the counter. "Mr.— Hang it, I've forgotten his name."

"The tall man that just went through with——"

"With Mr. Stokes," nodded Joe, glad to remember the other name.

"Oh! The tall gentleman is Mr. Archbold, a lawyer."

"Ah! I remember where I saw him now," mused Joe, lyingly. "It was in court. A rather powerful address he made to the jury, too."

"I never heard of it, then," replied the chatty young lady, opening her eyes. "People here in Blythe City always speak of Mr. Archbold as the lawyer who never seems to have a case in court. Yet he seems to make a fine living somehow."

The young woman, who was pretty as well as chatty,

sighed slightly, as if thinking what fun it would be, as Mrs. Archbold, to help spend the prosperous lawyer's money.

But Joe, having gained all he wanted to know, or thought safe to ask, strolled on with his newspaper.

He stopped, however, close to the hotel desk and began to run nimbly through the pages of the Blythe City directory.

He found but one Stokes—William—whose business was stated to be that of mining engineer.

No office address was given for Mr. Stokes, but merely that of his boarding-place.

From that name Joe looked for that of Beth Bronson.

But there were no Bronsons at all named in the directory.

"That was Bill Stokes, the civil engineer, with our friend Lawyer Archbold, wasn't it?" our hero asked, carelessly, of the day clerk.

"That's Bill Stokes, all right," nodded the clerk.

"Well, he is the civil engineer, isn't he?" persisted Joe.

"That's what he calls himself, I believe," yawned the clerk.

Joe stepped into the elevator and was whisked up to the third floor.

In a little room some twelve feet square, furnished in second-rate style, Joe hung up his hat on one of the nails.

Next he took pains to lock the door, then glanced up to see that the transom was tightly closed.

Next he felt in one of his pockets for the slip that had blown to his feet in the lobby.

"Don't know why I should take any interest in this matter," murmured the boy. "Yet it seems to me that there is something behind it all; something interesting, at that. It's about time for something to turn up, for I don't like to spend all my money before there's some more coming in again."

The slip of paper in his hand, he examined it thoughtfully.

"Greek—or rot!" he muttered, after staring blankly at the small sheet.

His eyebrows were gathered, his lips puckered, as he stared at what he saw on the paper that chance had blown his way.

Two letters, "G" and "F," not side by side, and surrounded by clusters of ordinary figures.

"That doesn't tell a fellow much," murmured the boy. "It might, though, after enough study."

Biff! Bang! Pound! Someone was hammering at the door. Joe had half a guess as he thrust the puzzling slip into an inner vest pocket.

Then, gliding over to the washstand, turning on the water, and grabbing up a towel, he called out:

"Just a second, my friend, whoever you are!"

With that Joe again crossed the room to the door, gave the key a quick, opening flip, then called:

"Come in!"

It was Stokes, his breath smelling badly from freshly swallowed whiskey.



There was an eager, anxious look in the man's eyes as he tried to smile engagingly and stepped into the room.

"Your name's——"

"Borden. Joe Borden," our hero broke in. He made it his rule never to appear ashamed of his name.

"Mr. Borden, I think you must have found something down in the lobby that is of interest to me," began the stranger, in an oily, anxious tone.

"I'm sorry," smiled Joe. "All I remember to have found down in the lobby was something that you also appear to have found."

"What do you mean?"

"All I found down there," laughed Joe, good-humoredly, "was my way up here."

Stokes looked disappointed, but went on quickly:

"I'm quite sure you don't understand, Mr. Borden. That which I lost, and wish to find, was a slip of white paper, about the size of an envelope, and contained some business figures of value to me. I remember that you were sitting close to the hotel entrance while I was talking with a friend. It was there that my friend lost the paper. He thought he had thrust it into one of his pockets. Instead he must have dropped it. The day clerk just told me that he saw you bend over from your chair and pick up something."

"My hat, which had fallen to the floor," Joe supplied, coolly.

"But are you sure that you didn't find the paper?"

"What do you think I am?" asked Joe, coolly. "A liar—or a fool?"

"Oh, neither, I am sure," returned Stokes, in his most oily tone. "But, Mr. Borden, if you could only understand——"

"How can you expect me to," Joe demanded, bluntly, "when you won't understand that I can't tell you anything about your paper?"

But Mr. Bill Stokes, far from appearing to be satisfied, inquired:

"May I take a seat, Mr. Borden?"

"Certainly," assented Joe, "if you're tired."

"I just want to say a few words, Mr. Borden. In the first place, to save a good deal of annoyance, I am willing to pay well for the recovery of that paper?"

"Yes? How much?"

Mr. Stokes promptly fished out two banknotes, folded together. Unfolding them, he showed them to be tens.

"I'll give you one of these notes for that paper, Mr. Borden."

"Is that all the money you have?" smiled Joe.

"All at the present moment," replied the civil engineer.

"Why, I could lend you money," laughed Joe.

From either trousers pocket this youngster drew a roll of bills the size of which caused Mr. Stokes' eyes to stick out with astonishment.

"Why, w-w-where on earth did you get so much money?" gasped the visitor.

"That's rather a personal question, isn't it?" demanded Joe.

"I—I beg your pardon, of course. But I was truly surprised to see you, such a boy, with so much money."

Joe thrust the rolls back into either pocket, jamming them well down.

He was afraid that if he held them up too long his caller might get a closer look and discover that in the middle of each roll a considerable quantity of worthless tissue paper was folded.

Joe had at the present moment a little less than three hundred dollars. That was low tide on funds with him, as the reader will presently discover.

Whenever funds ran low, Joe, who always liked to have a few fifty-dollar bills ready for use, wrapped them around rolls of tissue paper.

That always managed to give him the appearance of wealth.

"I should think you'd be afraid of being robbed," cried Stokes.

"I've always been able to defend myself so far," Joe retorted, with a quiet, fiery little flash in his cool, gray eyes that made him look older than he was.

"I see that you're superior to the temptations of a ten-dollar bill," went on Stokes, in his most oily way.

Then, as if to change the subject, Stokes went on:

"Mr. Borden, while you are very young in appearance, I am convinced that you have led and are leading a very interesting life."

"Does that show in my face?" smiled Joe, easily.

"It's in your manner," asserted Mr. Stokes. "You have more of the way of the world about you than most young men of your age."

"Perhaps that's right," nodded the boy.

"I do not remember to have seen you about town before," went on Stokes. "May I ask you where you live?"

With a light laugh Joe crossed the room.

"I live here," he replied, taking down and holding out his hat.

"I—I don't understand."

"Don't feel downhearted about it," smiled the boy. "Most folks don't understand when I tell 'em that I live in my hat. But that's just where I do live. My hat is the only real home that I have."

"From which," replied Stokes, "I judge that you have no near relatives and that you travel about a good deal."

"You're clever at guessing," nodded the boy.

"Do you go around the world a great deal?"

"Well," calculated Joe, modestly, "if all my travelling had been done in the same direction, I reckon I'd have been around the world about eight times by now."

"You amaze me!" gasped Stokes. "Er—how long have you been travelling in this fashion?"

"About two years."

"You—er—have an income, then, to travel on?"

"Yes," nodded Joe. "And a pretty good income, generally speaking. But I have to earn every dollar of it."



"Earn it! In what line do you travel, may I ask?"

"Any old line at all," laughed the boy. "Anything from the Cunard Line to a tramp steamer line."

"No, no; I mean—er—are you in a commercial line?"

"Oh, buying or selling?" cross-questioned Joe. "Never. I live on adventure—adventure pure and simple."

"Why, that's the most extraordinary thing I ever heard!" gasped Stokes. "Adventure? You have me guessing, young man."

"Well, I'll tell you about it," proposed the boy, settling down easily in a chair. He spoke truthfully as he went on:

"My father was the village drunkard—it don't matter where. He worried my mother into the grave in the unlucky year that I was thirteen. Dad and I bummed it, in that town and half through the county, the next two years. But there was one good thing—the school law made him keep me in school during the school year, or the law would have taken me away from him. Somehow, Dad didn't seem to want to part company with me."

"Well, when I was fifteen Dad went too. I knew it wasn't any good to try to pick up a living around that part of the State. So up and riding on the freight trucks for me. I got a hundred miles away before the trainmen caught me. Then, as I knew how to sing and dance, whistle, and tell a good story, the trainmen carried me into the train caboose. At the end of their run I got passed along with another freight crew. I managed to keep that up until I reached New York."

"There I struck it as cabin boy on a tramp steamer, bound for Hong Kong. In the Mediterranean Sea, near Egypt, we ran into a schooner in thick weather. Schooner went down. In an hour we found we were sinking. It was a rough night. We lost three boats in launching. That meant we couldn't all get off in the boats."

"The captain, who had taken a liking to me, did the old trick of going down with his ship—old-style fashion. He had eighteen thousand dollars of his own money; called me aside and made me fasten it in my clothes, and swear to take it to his wife."

"Somehow, the men in that boat with me guessed that I had the money. Then it was a fight to keep it. Once in the boat I lost it, but I spotted my man and kept quiet until we got ashore. Then I sneaked it back from him. Before I could get the money to a bank it was taken from me again, and I was pounded almost dead. But I got the money again, got it home to the captain's wife, after a pretty tough ride through the world, and she made me take a thousand dollars as a reward."

"With that money I started around the world again. I helped the revenue cutter men break up an opium ring at San Francisco, helped unearth native counterfeiters in the Philippines, recovered a lot of stolen gold and silver plate in England for a reward, tracked an embezzler to Durango, Mexico, and told the detectives where to find him——"

"Ah, I see," nodded Mr. Stokes, squirming uncomfortably. "You've a genius for detective work?"

"You and I won't like each other if you run away with

that notion," Joe retorted. "I never worked as a detective in my life, and don't want to. It's just sheer adventure, with lots of spice in it, that I want. Any old thing. I don't stick to any one thing, except travel and adventure. For instance, I chartered a small schooner from Sydney, Australia, to Friday Island once, and cleaned up seven hundred on a cargo of copra. I could have stayed in that part of the world and kept on in that business, but I always want something new."

"And you always make your trips pay?"

"I always have so far. Of course, there's a good deal of luck about it, and I may slip up one of these days and go broke again."

"You must have a good many interesting things, from all parts of the world, in your trunk?" hinted the visitor.

"My trunk?" repeated Joe. "Haven't I told you I live in my hat?"

"But surely you have a trunk?"

"Not even a hand satchel," grinned Joe. "Not even an umbrella! See here," and moving to the bureau, Joe pulled open the top drawer. "Here, you see, I have a clean shirt and a couple of collars, with two changes of cheap under-clothing besides. When I go away from here I carry nothing with me heavier than a handkerchief. Whatever changes I need I buy on the road, or wherever I stop at next. Never an ounce of baggage!"

"Why, that's most extraordinary," protested Stokes. "All travellers are supposed to carry at least a travelling bag."

"That's where I'm different from other folks," clicked Joe. "I go out in the world looking for opportunities. When I see one of the kind that I want I reach out like lightning and grab it with both hands. Now, what kind of a grab could I make if one hand was tied down holding on to a valise or carpet bag? I want both hands ready for anything at any time!"

"And you make a comfortable living just travelling around the world and living on the proceeds of honest adventure?" demanded Stokes.

"So far I have," Joe declared, with satisfaction.

"The most extraordinary thing I ever heard of!" cried the visitor.

"It's the easiest thing in the world," the boy retorted, provided you have a real instinct for adventure. But you've got to be able to know an adventure when you see one. I run across lots of things that I keep my hands off of."

"You're a most extraordinary character—the only one of your kind in the world!" cried Stokes.

Then, suddenly, ere Joe had had any time to guess what was coming next, the civil engineer shot out swiftly:

"Have you been misled into thinking you scented an adventure in that lost slip of paper?"

Joe started, just enough to make Stokes feel that the shot had told.

Then the boy made haste to reply, calmly:

"If I should have the good luck to find that paper, Mr. Stokes, I can judge better then."



"Don't try to. Bring it to me—if you find it," begged the caller, rising. "You seem to know my name?"

"I've heard your name from some one," Joe admitted carelessly, not betraying himself this time, under the close scrutiny of the man's eyes.

"If you find that piece of paper, young Mr. Borden, any one in Blythe City can tell you where to find me," said the visitor, moving toward the door.

"Any adventure connected with that slip?" demanded Joe, like a flash.

He had caught Stokes off his guard. That worthy started, changed color, then steadied his voice as he answered:

"No; nothing but dull commerce connected with that slip."

"Oh!" sighed the boy, as if disappointed.

"Remember, Mr. Borden."

"I'll remember."

The door closed, and the visitor was gone.

"I feel it!" chuckled Joe, striding up and down the room. "I feel it! It's in the air—and getting in my bones! There's an adventure in sight. That slip of paper is the key to it—the same key being now in my pocket! Come here, my home!"

Joe made a swoop for his hat, looked at it affectionately, then murmured:

"Dear old home!"

Chuckling, he tossed the hat up in the air, let it fall on top of his head, and marched out of the room.

There was no need to lock his door on leaving. There was nothing of value to be left behind.

"First of all, I'll take a sharp walk. That'll clear my head, and I can think," murmured Joe. "Then I'll make some searches around here—searches that may tell me why Lawyer Archbold and Civil Engineer Stokes—neither of whom seems to work at his trade—want that slip of paper."

For half an hour Joe walked briskly about the streets of the little city.

"There's something afloat that there's money in," concluded the boy. "Otherwise, that fellow Archbold wouldn't be interested. He isn't the man to hustle for ten-dollar bills unless it's a whole lot of 'em at once. Judging from the little that I heard 'em say, it's crooked and secret. If there's a whole lot of money in putting through a crooked job, why isn't there a pretty fair reward for yours truly in beating the crooked game? Settled! I'll get nosey about Archbold's doing right away!"

But Joe didn't. Half mechanically he stopped before a photographer's showcase and stood looking in.

In a twinkling Joe's eyes lighted on something there that held his gaze chained.

That something was the pictured face of a strikingly handsome young girl.

"Suffering Jupiter!" gasped the boy. "The face of the American girl that I saw, and then lost, in the crowd at the railway station in Durango, Mexico, that awful night! And now I've found her again!"

Cool, placid, easy-going Joe Borden was of a sudden turning all sorts of colors and trembling like a leaf in a gale.

## CHAPTER II.

THE ONLY ONE IS MIGHTILY JARRED.

"It's the same girl! I'd know her among a million!" gasped the boy, under his breath.

He was dazed, but not for long.

"I wonder if she lives in this town?"

In another twinkling he was climbing the flight of steps that led up to the photograph gallery on the floor above.

"Steady, boy! Easy!" he muttered to himself. "Photographers don't always give up that kind of information easily. You get in looking the way you do now, and not a word'll you get."

Joe had stopped panting by the time that he rested his hand on the door-knob of the studio. His face looked bland and free from excitement.

As he turned the knob some one else turned it from inside, while a voice rasped out:

"Four dollars a week is enough for a boy of your age. I've got to catch my train. Don't you close up before time!"

With that the man whom our hero had stepped back to make room for shot through the doorway and hurried down the stairs.

Then Joe stepped into the studio.

The only other occupant there was a sulky-faced youth of eighteen, who stood behind the show counter.

"A fellow on four dollars a week, and sore-headed about his pay, ought to be easy to swing my way," murmured Joe.

He stepped softly over to the young gallery helper.

There in the showcase again bloomed the portrait of that sweet young face.

Joe saw it instantly, but repressed his start.

"Pretty tough boss, ain't he?" inquired our hero, his voice soft with sympathy.

"He's a hog!" burst savagely from the other youth.

"Cheer up, friend!" cooed Joe. "I'm something of a fortune teller. There's money coming your way. You could use five dollars, couldn't you?"

"Couldn't I, though?" muttered the other youngster.

"A five-dollar bill looks something like this piece of paper," tempted Joe, wickedly laying a banknote on top of the glass showcase. "Take it up and look at it—that's right. It's genuine. Now, put it in your pocket."

"What do you want?" demanded the other youth, with a sudden show of suspicion.

Joe never lied when it wasn't necessary.

"Tell me the name of this young lady?" hinted Joe, pointing straight at the tantalizing photo.

"Say, but that's against the rules!" muttered the other youth. "Photographers are never supposed to give their sitters' names to strangers who ask for 'em."

"Oh, if you can't spend that five dollars," yawned Joe, wickedly, "hand it back. Your boss would take it."



"I guess he would," admitted the boy. "Well, I'm going to, then!"

"That's right, brother," approved Joe. "Now, the young lady's name is——"

"Beth Bronson," replied the gallery helper promptly.

Joe Borden almost reeled. He certainly gasped.

"Beth Bronson? The same that Archbold and Stokes were talking about! She's the one they're plotting against—the rascals! Was I right about scenting an adventure? And one that will carry me back to THAT girl!"

"Say," asked the gallery helper, "what ails you, anyway?"

"A sudden pain," groaned Joe, hypocritically rubbing his stomach. "I had deviled crab for dinner. It always does upset me. Leave me alone a minute, and I'll be all right."

The gallery helper looked on in genuine concern until Joe's deceptive face gradually cleared.

"There, I'm all right now," declared our hero. "By the way, does Miss Bronson live here in Blythe City?"

"No; she was here a little while this last summer."

"Where does she live?"

"I forget the place now."

"But your address book will show it," persisted Joe.

"It'll be about another five dollars' worth of trouble to look that up," suggested the other youth, slyly.

"Say, you won't be working here long at four dollars a week," chuckled Borden, good-humoredly, as he pulled out another five.

But he held on to the banknote, explaining:

"This'll pass over to you when you show me the young lady's address in your book."

Flushing, then nodding, the young rogue disappeared into a big cupboard, but came out with a book.

He ran over the pages for a moment, then pointed his finger to the written entry:

"Miss Elizabeth Bronson, Woodmere."

"Woodmere?" asked Joe. "Where is the place?"

About forty miles from here on the same railroad."

"Thank you, brother. Now, I've only one more remark to make. That copy of the photo passes over to me in connection with this second five."

"The boss 'd miss it," objected the gallery helper.

"Take a chance!"

"Here you are."

The photo was passed over with a quick movement. In a twinkling it dropped inside Joe's inner jacket pocket.

In another twinkling Joe was down in the street.

"Beth Bronson! Same girl Archbold and his oily man were plotting about. And I've got a little piece of paper that affects her rights in some way. Say, I don't need to make money all the time! I'm in this for Simon-pure adventure!"

Joe found it necessary to take another walk.

Yet he had not gone far before he came to a quick conclusion.

"Why, I don't need to think much about this," he re-

flected. "All I've got to do is to get on the next train for Woodmere. See Miss Beth as soon as I can—alone. Then I can tell her just what I know so far. She ought to know the rest. She'll tell me what I can do."

Joe's long stride turned toward the railway station.

He was about to enter the waiting-room when by the open window of the ticket office he heard a sound that stopped him.

Click-click! click-click! The telegraph instrument was spelling the one word "Woodmere."

Joe had learned telegraphy a year ago.

"That must have been the last word of the address," he muttered, pricking up his ears.

Plainly it was, for now he heard the message clicking:

"Will be on eight-forty train to-night. Board same train with young woman."

FREDERICK ARCHBOLD."

"Smoking Jupiter!" ejaculated the boy, his eyes bulging. "That young woman must certainly be Beth Bronson. I don't need a time-table now. I know the thain that I'll be on!"

Click-click! A break was sounding on the wire. Then came the request from the Woodmere operator:

"Repeat name of addressee slowly."

With almost painful slowness the Blythe operator sent back:

"Mrs. Rachel Underwood."

"Rachel," murmured the eavesdropping boy, "you must be the powerful ally Archbold and Stokes were talking about. But I'll know soon, for I'm going to be there on that train too!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### SLICK? GLOSSY!

"All aboard!" cried Joe Borden, cheerily.

Just as the 8:40 pulled out of Blythe City our hero made the last platform, darting from his hiding-place between two freight cars on the side track.

Stepping into the rear car, he dropped into one of the last seats.

Before the train came up he had seen Lawyer Archbold on the platform.

There could be no doubt that that tall worthy was aboard the train somewhere.

"And it's just as well that he isn't in this car," murmured the boy.

Leaning back in the seat, pulling the brim of his soft hat slightly forward over his eyes, the boy who lived in that hat took a half-curious survey of the inmates of the car.

There were not many besides himself—four women and seven or eight men.



"If Archbold did see me, would he suspect anything, anyway?" wondered Joe. "Anyway, he couldn't do more than suspect. I'm going to see Miss Beth Bronson, show her that blessed slip, and tell her what I've overheard. I can't do more, unless she gives me some clew to work upon, or unless she asks me to keep on the trail of our dark gentleman.

This settled in his mind, our hero did not look for a very eventful trip.

He settled back to plan how it would be best to approach Miss Bronson and make her acquaintance.

"I've never forgotten her since that fearful night in Durango," murmured the boy. "Somehow, I've always felt sure that I'd meet her again somehow, and now I'm on the way to that meeting!"

Oily little Archbold had not been seated more than two minutes, in a car well up forward, when oily little Stokes made his way to the side of his chief.

Stokes whispered a few words in the other man's ear.

"What?" whispered Archbold, sitting up and looking worried.

Stokes nodded.

"In the last car, you say?"

"In the last car!"

"Then he must be——"

"Some kid hustling for a detective agency!" whispered Stokes.

There was a savage gleam in Archbold's eyes.

But the lids fell quickly over those eyes.

He was thinking. Not pleasantly, either, as the firm, hard, cruel lines that formed around his mouth showed.

Stokes waited patiently for the orders to come.

"See here!" whispered Archbold, suddenly.

Stokes bent his ear to catch the message.

Then the oily little coward started backward.

His rubicund face had gone suddenly white.

"Do you mean that?" he demanded.

"Yes," whispered Archbold, decisively. "It may be severe, but to-night is critical for us. I won't take a single fool chance. Besides, Barrows, even if caught, is game. He can be depended upon never to bring it back to us."

"I—I don't like the sound of it," stammered cowardly Stokes.

"I didn't ask you whether you did not not," hissed Archbold. "Stokes, you coward, you're to take orders—not pass upon 'em. Now, do as I've told you, or take the consequences! You know what that means!"

"Y-y-yes, I know!" shuddered the oily man.

"Then," whispered Archbold, his eyes gleaming meaningly, "I expect to hear nothing more except that my order has been carried out to the letter!"

Half slumping, Stokes dragged himself off into a car still further forward.

Joe, in the mean time, had no reason to suppose that he was discovered.

Having nothing to read, he was dully passing the hour

and thirty-five minutes that the train needed in order to reach Woodmere.

It was eighteen minutes to the first stop.

Now a young man came into the car, from the rear, carrying a small dress-suit case.

"Any objection to company?" he asked, pausing smilingly beside our hero's seat.

Joe saw a stocky, well built, well dressed young fellow.

"Not at all," replied our hero, good-humoredly, making room on the seat.

He sized up his well built young companion as one who must have taken the full course in college athletics.

"Over an hour's ride, and it'll be dull," remarked the young man. "I'm on my way home, for the first time in two months. It seems like an age, but I suppose Woodmere looks like the same old place."

There was just a suspicion of a gleam of interest in Joe's eyes as the stranger looked into them.

"You live in Woodmere?" Joe asked, with what he tried to make appear as polite interest.

"Born and brought up there," asserted the well built young stranger. "But I've been on the road for the last year. Up to the present I know every one who lives in the sleepy little old town. If I go away on many more long trips, though, I'll soon be forgotten. My mother would be tremendously lonesome if it wasn't for her neighbor, Mrs. Underwood."

Again a faint gleam of interest in Joe's eyes.

Perhaps the stranger noticed it.

But then he went on to talk glibly about a good many people in whom our hero took no interest whatever.

Then finally the stranger added:

"There's one mighty fine girl down there I hope will be glad to see me back—Miss Beth Bronson."

This time there was a decided gleam of interest in Joe's usually quiet eyes.

But he did not speak at once, for he did not believe in being as chatty as this glib young stranger seemed willing to be.

Joe soon began to yawn over Woodmere tales.

The stranger changed the subject.

"Know anything about this country we're going through?" questioned the young man, presently.

"Nothing, except that it's on the map somewhere," smiled Joe.

The young man laughed, then went on:

"No one ever thought this would develop into an oil country. But three wells have been started lately, and I tell you they're real gushers. The best gives three hundred barrels of crude oil every twenty-four hours. I'm interested, because I've got stock. Just now I'm feeling bad because of a telegram I got this evening. One of the wells is afire. We'll pass it soon, I expect. It's about five miles from the track, but even at that distance a geyser of coal oil on fire must be a pretty sight. Suppose we go out on the rear platform and have a look at it."



"That's in my line, I reckon," nodded the unsuspecting boy, rising. "All new sights interest me."

"You'll get over that a bit, I guess," smiled the stranger, "when you've seen more of the world."

"So far I reckon I must have traveled about two hundred thousand miles," Joe returned, quietly.

"Whew! Well, come on! After you!"

The stranger held the door open, permitting the unsuspecting boy to pass out ahead of him.

With the train running at forty miles an hour there was a stiff breeze. Joe's hand went up to pull his hat on tight.

"Here, look off to the left for the first glimpse of the burning oil geyser!" roared the stranger in our hero's ears, above the roar of the train and the clatter of the wheels.

"Don't see it yet," Joe shouted back.

"I got a glimpse then through the trees," bawled the stranger. "In another mile we ought to have a good glimpse of it."

"But there's no red reflection in the sky," Joe objected.

"You'll see the whole sight, unless the fire is down, within a minute or two."

"I guess your fire's out—if it ever started," suggested Joe, doubtfully.

He was about to turn.

But just then the stranger caught him swiftly in both muscular arms, strapping Joe's arms to his side.

"Here—what the dickens!" roared Joe, struggling to free himself. "Help! Murder!"

Joe began to wonder if he was in the grip of a madman.

In another second, with all the ease in the world, the stranger threw Joe bodily up in the air, clear of the train!

On rushed the express train, whil Joe Borden, whirling two somersaults, headed down hard for earth!

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE TRAIN WRECKERS.

Whish! To the side of the track, and down beyond a steep embankment whirled the boy in his fearful flight.

The end, while sudden, would have been amazing, had Joe Borden known it.

Instead of landing on rocks or hard earth, his shoulders struck on the yielding top of a winter haycock, stacked up there by some thrifty farmer.

Turn! Almost making another somersault, the unconscious youngster rolled and slid until his feet touched the earth, his shoulders resting back against the hay.

There Joe lay, as still and knowingless as if death had really overtaken him.

In the first place, his dizzying flight through air had dazed and dizzied him.

Probably he was unconscious ere he reached the hay.

The sudden stop, even on that soft mass, and the subsequent sharp roll downward completed the numbing of his mind.

For some time the boy lay there, in that half-standing position against the hay.

At last he stirred slightly, though still he knew nothing.

Then, after a long pause, his eyes opened.

A low, meaningless laugh escaped his lips.

He did not understand yet, but he knew that something tough had happened, and it was his instinct to meet hard luck with a grin.

After another while he began to stir—cautiously, as if trying, half-consciously, to learn the extent of the damage done to him.

Motion soon served to clear the boy's mind still more.

"The train? That fellow? Oh, the deuce! Say, I got pitched good and plenty, didn't I?"

A half-silly laugh came from between his lips. He began to rub himself and look for sore spots.

"Say, it would take more than that to kill a chap who's been knocked about as much as you have, Joe Borden!" he grinned.

Now, as more of it came back to him and his mind began to reach its usual clearness, Joe first laughed, then started.

That hat, jammed on hard, was still on his head.

Reaching up, Joe removed it with a waving flourish, then bowed toward the embankment.

"My hat's off!" he muttered. "The Archbold crowd? Slickest people I ever ran into!"

Joe took a few steps to make sure that he was not crippled by his rough experience.

His back ached; there was a severe pain at the back of his neck.

That appeared to be the total of his injuries.

"Oh, what a fool you are, Joe Borden!" the boy growled disgustedly, as he painfully climbed the steep banking to the track. "You've been about and seen so much. You've learned so much that other boys don't know. And then you get a trick like this played on you! Bah! That trick ought not to have fooled an idiot."

Out there on that lonely stretch of track Joe halted, looking about him.

Not a light now anywhere in sight.

"I wonder what time it can be," murmured the boy, hauling out his watch.

He held it up to his ear, but no tick-tick answered. He shook the watch, getting only the sound of broken works inside. Then he glanced at the hands.

"Five minutes past nine? The time that I was pitched off that train! The whirl and the stop was enough to break the watch. It was a wonder it didn't break me. Wonder what time it is, anyway?"

Then came from the boy's lips a cry of anger.

"And in this time Archbold has met Beth Bronson. Whatever villany is on foot may be finished by this time! Oh, Joe Borden, you fool! A fine friend you'd be to anybody!"

Looking up overhead to get the points of the compass, Joe decided in which direction Woodmere lay.

Then, in a grimly savage humor with himself, the boy started his dreary trudge down the track to—somewhere!

"If Beth Bronson is still in Woodmere, I'll find her! If



she's been taken away from there, I've got the clew for following her. If Archbold has brought any harm to her——"

Joe's warm blood seemed to run ice cold at the thought.

"If he has, I'll hang to that scoundrel like the avenging angel!"

His angry thoughts, his eager anxiety for Beth, the girl to whom he had never spoken but long remembered, strengthened him as he strode along the track.

If Joe ached now, he did not know it. He could not stop to think of being tired, played out.

His whole thought centered on reaching the next station.

If there was not a train leaving soon, then he would do his level best to hire an automobile and driver to take him through to Woodmere.

"I'll get there in the least time—the shortest cut," he blazed to himself wrathfully.

Did Archbold merely want Beth and that older woman to meet him at the train, or did the lawyer expect them to journey onward with him?

Joe wondered over it all as he trudged along.

"Oh, the slowness of this!" groaned the boy. "And it does no good to guess. I can know nothing about it until I get to Woodmere."

The night was wark, though sufficiently clear for the stars to be visible overhead.

With such light on his path Joe Borden was compelled to be satisfied.

Yet every minute of the way his glance was peering ahead for the first signs of a railway station's lights.

At last he halted, peering searchingly ahead.

"Why, that building must be a railroad building of some sort," he murmured, staring hard at the dim outlines of a structure. "No light there? That's strange. Hang it! Means that the last train has gone by for the night!"

As Joe stood gazing, with a heart that was sinking lower still, he saw figures flit across the track.

Now he made out the forms of three men who appeared to be tremendously busy.

"Freight handlers? Not likely," he reflected. "They wouldn't be working at this time of the night in a lonely country town. Trackmen? They must be. Well, it will seem good to have some one to ask a question or two of!"

Joe started ahead once more, briskly, as the sound of tools against steel rails came faintly to his ears.

"Hold on! Blazes!"

Joe stopped short in his tracks, gasping and staring hard toward the distant building and the flitting figures.

"Trackmen be hanged!" he pulsed, feeling a trifle sick in that sudden discovery. "Trackmen in a repair gang would use lanterns when working at night! And they'd have signals set up the track in both directions. Those scoundrels are——"

Young Borden's face went white and stern as he finished:

"Train wreckers!"

Yes, that was what they must be, these men who, without

lights and seemingly with as soft blows as they could strike, appeared to be busy over the track in this lonely, out-of-the-way place.

"They haven't seen me yet," vented Borden, sliding down the embankment. "They shan't either, until I get ready!"

Now screened by the high banking, Joe stole forward swiftly but as stealthily as a cat stalks a rat.

At last, where the ground level came up closer to the railway grade the boy was forced to make a wide turn away from the track.

Now, by keeping the freight shed just ahead between himself and the men, he was able to approach much closer without being detected.

"Train wreckers? I should say they were!" quavered the prying boy, peering ahead.

Train wreckers, indeed! For these silent workers in the dark had torn up some two or three lengths of track.

At this very moment they were engaged in securing railroad ties across what remained of the track at the break.

"Oh, the scoundrels!" groaned the watching boy. "Bent on destroying scores of lives! All for what? A little loot?"

Desperately Joe glanced around him.

There was no house within sight to which he could run for help.

"And I can't leave the track now!" throbbed the horrified boy. "No knowing what minute now a train will run along into that dose!"

A helpless, frightened look around, as he stood just out of sight of the workers.

Then Joe Borden came to a desperate decision—the only one that there was time to put through.

"Just plain yeggmen," he decided. "Desperate men, out of work and turned crooks. They won't have the nerve of old-time criminals! It's taking a huge chance, but I've got to do it if I'm to stop that villainy surely and save lives!"

Yet, even with all his grit, Joe didn't immensely like the desperate work that he was cutting out for himself.

He waited a moment, steeling his nerves for the effort.

Then suddenly he ran slowly forward, shouting loudly:

"Come on, neighbors! Here are the scoundrels that are tearing up the track! If they fire a shot our way lynch 'em!"

From the other side of the freight house came an answer of startled voices.

"I'll give 'em plenty of time to run," thought Joe grimly, as he slackened his trot a trifle. "Whee! I wish I could see 'em streaking down the track. It's no joke if they wait for me to come up."

Over the wrecked portion of the track stood two of the yeggmen, as still as if paralyzed by sudden fright.

But a third, upon the freight house platform, stole softly around for a look at the on-coming host.

An instant later Joe charged around the corner of the freight house.

"He's all alone!" bawled the running yeggman on the platform.



That news acted like a tonic, a stimulant on the two frightened wretches in the trackway.

It was to Waterloo now that Joe Borden charged!

The nearest yeggman, a big and bearded ruffian, leaped forward, brandishing a club.

"Yer will stop us, will yer?" snarled the yeggman angrily, and he rushed at the boy with the club raised in his left hand.

His companion ran to his assistance.

Joe was alarmed, for he realized that he was no match for them.

There was but one thing to be done—to dodge as that club swept downward at him.

Joe dodged, but as he did so he slipped, and then the man from the platform, who had leaped down, caught the boy from behind throwing him.

"Hold him there!" snarled he with the club, as Joe's victor held him to earth.

Young Borden did not struggle, well knowing that to do so would be only to invite a worse beating.

"What are yer mixing up with us for?" blazed Joe's captor, while the two other yeggmen waited wrathily for his answer.

"Have you fellows any idea what a crime you are committing?" demanded Borden, doughtily.

"A parson!" sneered the wretch with the club. "Wants to reform us! Nothing but money'll do that, young feller, and we're broke. Tell ye what ye do, fellers. Tie 'im and lay him over the track up the road! That'll get rid o' him an' geep 'im from squealin' on us afterwards."

"Maybe he's got some dough in his clothes," hinted Joe's captor, eagerly. "If he has, we need it."

The big fellow knelt across Joe, the captor falling back a bit.

"Here's a little of the green flimsy," pronounced the big man, leaning up to inspect the money that he had secured from the boy's pockets. "About seven dollars," he announced, after counting.

Desperate as his fix was, Joe Borden could not help grinning inwardly at the thought:

"Wouldn't they be paralyzed, if they got my shoes off and found the money that's hidden in them!"

"Pretty poor amount of dough," grumbled the yeggman who had first downed Joe. "But say! There's no need o' letting good things go to waste. I b'lieve this kid's good clothes would fit me."

"And them shoes," put in the third yeggman. "They're just my style, size and fit."

"Take 'em off, then. They're yours," growled the big yeggman.

## CHAPTER V.

### LIFE-SAVING FIREWORKS.

When a fellow's silent, he may be thinking!

That was just what Joe Borden was doing at this moment.

As the bearded yeggman bent over him, Joe saw the butt of a revolver sticking out of the fellow's hip pocket.

Joe's left hand shot straight out for that pistol-butt. His fingers closed over it.

In the same instant Joe Borden rolled backward, as if trying to turn a back somersault.

Chug! The toes of his shoes, as they came up, caught the bearded yeggman in the back of the head.

It wasn't so much of a clip, but the whole maneuver succeeded in rolling the big fellow off of the boy.

In a twinkling Joe was on his knees; then he made a sudden leap and a spring that carried him forward.

He was safe out of arm's reach, with the pistol now in his right hand as he sped.

But back of him, as Joe tried to dash off up the track, he heard the feet of the pursuing yeggmen pounding.

"Stop, kid, or ye'll get killed!" roared the bearded brute. Joe put on another spurt.

Crack! Whi-zz-zz!

A pistol bullet sang so close to his right ear that Joe Borden knew in a second that these men did not halt at deadly work.

Crack! Hardly slacking in his run, Joe thrust the muzzle of his borrowed revolver around over his left shoulder and fired at the pursuers.

Crack! That bullet all but singed Joe's left cheek.

"Lead won't stop 'em!" vibrated the boy. "It's life or death!"

He was within a half a dozen steps of a building at the trackside.

One wide-open window yawned blackly before him.

It was only a shed, an old, flimsy structure.

But the wood might be thick enough to stop bullets.

These walls might afford a shelter behind which to stand off desperate men in a stiff fight for life or death!

A leap, and nimble Joe vaulted cleanly through the open window into the blackness inside.

He landed on his feet, then went up plump against a cask.

Like a flash the boy turned.

The three yeggmen were dashing straight up toward this window.

Crack! That was Joe's shot—fired in good earnest, too.

As far as he could tell, in the second that followed, he had hit no one, but he had the satisfaction of seeing the yeggmen halt and spread out as soon as they realized that their victim meant business.

"Oh, why doesn't someone hear and come?" grumbled the boy, as he fumbled back in the darkness, watching the scattering of the yeggmen.

Crack! crack! crack! Everyone of those three shots struck the wooden walls, one piercing its way inside.

Then came a hail:

"Come out, kid, and throw down that gun, and we'll let ye live!"

"Wonder if they think I'm going to answer that?" mocked the boy, under his breath.

In groping, still with his gaze toward the window, he had come upon a hogshead lying on its side.



For an instant Joe bent down, the smell attracting him. "Coal oil!" he muttered. "I thought so!" His nimble fingers found a bung-hole in place. All in a twinkling an idea came to him. Looking around, Joe thought he saw a crack of light in the wall opposite the open window.

But first of all he stepped nearer to the open window. Off in the grass beyond the boy saw a bearded head rise. Joe fired for that head, taking pains only to send the bullet close to the head.

Then over to that crack of light in the opposite wall he moved.

"Just what it seemed to be," he murmured, joyously. "A wooden shutter that will swing open."

He didn't swing it, just then, but went back to the keg that lay on the ground.

Giving it a slight roll, he sent the bung-hole plug nearer to the ground. Then, with a hard wrench, he drew the plug out.

Gurgle! Standard oil was running over the floor of the shed in a heavy, odorous stream.

But Joe hopped back to the window, took another shot at something moving in the grass, then moved back, to find the cask empty after a few moments.

"Setting fire to a building is arson, and against the law," throbbed the boy, eagerly. "But how about this sort of fireworks, when one's only object is to save lives? That ought to excuse a fellow. I'll take a chance, anyway," he concluded, grimly.

Flare! The tiny jet of light trembled a bit in his hand as he held it ready.

"Oh, pshaw! This is no time to hesitate," he grunted. "What's one life against fifty, even if it is my life?"

Grinning, desperately, he bent down with the lighted match, touching at the edge of a pool of coal oil.

In another instant he straightened, dashed for the closed shutter, thrust it open and vaulted through.

Nor did he reach the ground outside an instant too soon.

For, almost in a twinkling, the floor of that shanty was a mass of lurid, thick, smoky, yellow flame!

Whether there was anyone lurking on this side of the shanty to stop his flight was something the boy now had to consider.

Ah, yes! Right here in front of him was one of the yeggmen, just in the act of rising out of the grass to fire upon him.

Flash! That pistol-light seemed almost to burn in the boy's face, though it was a dozen feet away.

Just by the shade of a quarter of an inch did that ball miss his head.

Crack! Joe's fourth cartridge struck the ground just before the feet of the young yeggman, causing that worthy to jump as if stung.

And now Joe, past his enemy, was sprinting for dear life, straight up the slope of a hillside that stretched beyond.

"Come on, and we'll get him!" roared the yeggman whom Joe had so hastily distanced.

But now a hoarse yell rang from behind.

The other two yeggmen had discovered Joe's real trick.

That oil shed was now a mass of roaring flames.

As the yeggman nearest our hero turned at the yell, he swore roundly.

Joe, dropping close to the ground under the shelter of the first clump of trees that he came to on the hillside, looked backward with huge enjoyment.

It was a glorious sight, that blazing, crackling oil-shed.

Even as our hero took his first look, he saw a deeper jet of yellow flame shoot up through the roof of the shed.

Then came the boom of a dull explosion.

One of the full casks of oil had exploded. Having a high flame-point, the oil had not exploded as disastrously as gasoline would have done.

But now the flames roared and crackled with greater racket than ever.

Almost instantly came another boom.

Down on the railroad track, some distance from the shed, stood two yeggs, beckoning to the fellow who had tried to stop Joe Borden.

"You fellows feel up a stump, now, for fair, don't you?" chuckled watching Joe, to whom the blazing building made objects around that part of the track almost as plain as by day.

Joe felt like shaking hands with himself.

With the oil to soak into the wood and feed the flame, this fire would likely last for hours—perhaps until daylight.

It would serve as beacon to trains coming from either direction.

No engineer, seeing such a furious blaze ahead, and close to the track, would run his train anywhere near it until the train crew had first gone forward to investigate.

One of the first things that such trainmen would discover would be the torn-up track close at hand.

"There'll be no train-wreck to-night," glowed the boy, in the pride of a thing well done. "What's a few barrels of oil? If the company don't want to settle the bill for having its train saved, I'll pay the bill myself."

Past the glow and its confines the three yeggmen had hurried off up the track.

"Just on the side," murmured Joe, in some anxiety, "I've got to make sure that they don't round this hill and swoop down on me when I'm not looking. If they wanted to kill me before I spoiled their job, how on earth can they feel toward me now!"

Another boom, and, finally, a fourth, came from succeeding explosions.

"As I remember it," murmured the boy, "there were just four casks of oil in that shed. If that's so, we won't have any more noise, now, but just a good, steady glare for hours."

Truly, the oil-drenched pile was burning as if the fire never would be quenched.



"Crackey!" muttered the boy, leaning upward in sudden alarm, and listening. "While I've been hiding here and enjoying the fireworks, I seem to have plumb forgot that those rascals could hurry up the track and tear up the rails somewhere else."

It seemed risky to venture from his retreat.

But Joe could see nothing else left to do except to leave his hiding place and go cautiously on up the track, trailing those desperadoes.

He stood up, looked cautiously about, then started, obliquely, toward the track, keeping as much as he could beyond the glow of light.

Not half way had he gone, however, when, a mile up the track, rang the sharp whistle.

"Gracious!" gasped the boy. "That's an express—sure!"

He started to run for the track, now, in terrible earnest, but suddenly brought up short.

"What's the use of getting out of breath?" he laughed. "The fellows haven't had time to tear up the track anywhere else—yet."

Whirling onward at fifty miles an hour, that train was rapidly drawing to the spot.

"What if the engineer doesn't see the flames until it's too late to stop?" panted the boy.

He felt faint and sick at the awful prospect of seeing a trainful of travellers dash into destruction before his eyes.

"If what I've done doesn't work the trick, then there's nothing left to do," he groaned.

His head dizzy with fright, his knees weak under him, he sank to the ground.

There, in the near distance, was the red glare of the engine's fire against the dark sky overhead.

Joe felt tempted to shut his eyes to the horror, but he could not.

Then another sharp whistle sounded. Joe knew that sound—the whistle for brakes!

"Glory! Now, will they be able to stop in time?"

He watched like one fascinated, as, indeed, Borden was. The train was in sight now, its speed gradually lessening.

The engine's pneumatic brakes, aided by the work of the train crew at the hand brakes, was gradually lessening the headway.

"Oh, I hope they make the stop in time!" chattered the boy.

Nearer glided the train, despite the efforts to stop it.

Now another sharp whistle, and, almost with a wrench, the train came to a jarring stop, fully four hundred feet away from the blazing oil-shed.

"Good! Great! That's all right!" glowed the boy, leaping to his feet.

He was well past the clearest glow of the fire.

He had reached the train, without being noticed, by the time that the first groups of curious passengers were on the ground, eager to know what had caused this stop.

Those first to the ground came from the three day

coaches. Behind these were four Pullman cars, heavy and dark, nearly all of their occupants sleeping.

But, almost in a twinkling, it seemed, two of the train-crew were back with the startling news that track had been torn up ahead and obstructions piled for a wreck.

Now everybody had questions to ask at once, of others who knew no more than themselves.

Joe, who had mingled so well with the passengers that he seemed to be one of them, felt at no pains to tell all that he knew.

Standing on the ground near the platforms between a day coach and a Pullman, Joe Borden suddenly received an electric shock.

If it wasn't really that, it was something wonderfully like it in effect.

For out of the front door of the Pullman, wrapped in a long, light travelling ulster was the girl whose photograph the yeggman had passed by in going through Joe's pockets.

Beth Bronson! There couldn't be a doubt of it.

It was the same face that Joe had seen before in Mexico on a well-remembered night—the same girl.

He stood there, glaring at her in bewilderment, for Beth, if travelling to-night, should have been on a train going in the opposite direction.

Should he speak to her? Joe, after swift reflection, decided to watch and wait his chance.

The girl, with hardly an instant's hesitation, turned to leave the train from the opposite side to that on which her eager, unknown champion stood.

Her foot had just touched the ground when the girl glanced up into the face of a fellow-passenger, who was coming along at the side of the train.

"You here?" shuddered the girl, starting back. "You came, too, on this train?"

Joe Borden saw that man's face. He could hardly keep from crying out. For the face that filled the girl with fright was the dark, evil, cold, cruel face of Frederick Archbold!

Joe had just presence of mind enough to dodge out of sight on his side of the train.

"Why, Miss Bronson, why shouldn't I be on the train?" our hero heard the lawyer ask, in a tone that was meant to be pleasant.

"If you are here, then no wonder death lurks in the air!" cried the girl, desperately.

"Indeed, I am flattered, Miss Bronson. But I will not annoy you. See! I take myself away!"

His hastening footsteps on the gravel sounded to Joe's ears.

"Oh, that man fills me with fear as much as he does with loathing!" cried the girl, in a voice that reached Borden's ears and made his heart bound. "Even death may certainly lurk in my path, since he persists in following me!"

It was time to do something. Darting up the steps, Joe went nimbly down the last one on the other side.

"Miss Beth Bronson!" he whispered, leaning slightly out toward the girl.



She turned swiftly, gazing at our hero bewilderedly.  
 "What—how—who are you?" cried the girl, tremulously, one hand clutching over her heart.  
 "A friend!" breathed Joe, rapidly. "A staunch friend—and I think you need one!"

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE HAUNTED GIRL.

Beth Bronson shot at her would-be champion a look of renewed terror.

"You're afraid of me?" whispered Joe. "I don't blame you. But you wouldn't be afraid of me if Archbold should catch me here. The glare he'd give me would promote me into favor in your eyes."

Beth did not try to stir away.

She gazed intently at this eager boy with the glowing face.

She was studying him, trying to detect some flaw in his presence of friendliness.

"By the way," whispered Joe, eagerly, "do you happen to know anything about a slip of paper with the initials 'G' and 'F' written on it, and figures grouped around each letter?"

Beth's eyes became luminous.

"Yes, yes!" she whispered, her lips moving for the first time since that first cry of hers.

"Is it anything you want?" asked Joe, swiftly.

"Yes! Oh, yes!"

"Well, I've got it!" flashed Joe, triumphantly. "I got it away from Archbold and a little man named Stokes."

Again Beth stretched out an imploring hand.

"Give it to me—quick!" she whispered.

"I can't," Joe declined. "Simply can't—just now. It's—in one of my shoes."

Beth suddenly started back, incredulously.

"You're mocking me!" she uttered, suspiciously, half-angrily. "I never saw you before. I don't know you."

"You don't know me," corrected Joe, boldly, "but you've seen me before."

"Where? When?"

"Think back a little way, Miss Bronson. You remember having been in Durango, Mexico?"

At the recollection Beth shuddered.

"You remember the night the bandits raided the town—tried to make it out a revolution, but their real game was to loot one of the banks there and get away with the money?"

"What do you know about that?" breathed Beth, wonderingly.

"There were a party of Americans at the depot, waiting to take a night train away from Durango," Joe went on.

"Yes, but what——"

"Then the rurales—mounted Mexican police—rode in from the next nearest town. Rurales and bandits fought like fiends. The fight raged all around the railway station. Several Americans got hit by the flying bullets."

"Oh, that awful night!" shivered Beth, her wide-open eyes still on Joe's face.

"In the midst of all the excitement," hurried on Joe, "the night express steamed in. The fighting was going on fiercer than ever. Many Americans had huddled inside the station, and didn't dare leave. Some made a dash through the storm of bullets, across the platform, and into the train. One young man grabbed you up, made a dash across the platform and left you in the train, much more than half-fainting. Then that same young man darted back after the woman he had seen with you. He came staggering out with that woman, and got her aboard, somehow."

"You bring the picture all back," gasped the girl. "When I came to, after the train had left that horrid place, I was told I had been saved by a young hero."

"I was that—hero," announced Joe Borden, meekly.

"You!"

Beth started toward him, grasping one of his hands, gratefully.

"But why did you not stay on the train with us?" she asked, wondering.

"I meant to."

"What prevented you?"

"The woman that was with you sent me back to get her bag, and——"

"A miserable piece of baggage!"

"The train was beyond reach when I got back to the platform with that bag," explained Joe.

"I believe you now!" cried the girl, impulsively.

"Then please me now, Miss Bronson, by running off to a little distance from here, where I may talk to you without anyone else hearing. Come! It will be two or three hours before the train can leave here."

As he spoke, Joe tightened his grip on the hand of hers that he held, and led her up over the car-steps.

"There comes my guardian, Mrs. Underwood," murmured Beth. "Shall we wait for her?"

The answer that shot back over Joe's shoulder made Beth Bronson jump:

"Not on your life! She's in the plot against you! Scoot!"

Beth's feet touched the ground lightly as Joe caught her in his arms.

He did not wait to linger over the situation, but conducted her rapidly down the track for a distance of nearly two car-lengths, then branched off into the field from which he had first approached the train.

"If you're afraid—if you don't trust me," he whispered, "you've only to remember that a single good scream would bring a mob of people from the train."

"Oh, I trust you—now," whispered Beth, in a low voice that thrilled the boy. "But it's all so strange! Yet now, as I look at you, I feel certain that I remember having seen your face in that frightened crowd at Durango."

"And you'll trust me, on the strength of that night?" half smiled Joe.



"Why shouldn't I? Especially when I am in such desperate need of a friend?"

"Will you go a little further up this hillside with me?" Joe asked, nodding up toward the sloping gully in which he had hidden from the yeggmen.

"Why not?" asked Beth, calmly.

"I—I didn't know as you'd quite care to go so far that you couldn't be heard from the train."

"Why, the fact that you're so careful of me proves to me that I'm safe with you," protested the girl, earnestly.

"Thank you, Miss Bronson. Well, at least, up by this gully, we're not likely to be bothered or spied upon. Here, why not take a seat on this rock?"

Stripping off his jacket, he spread it over the top of the rock.

Beth was about to seat herself, when her eye was caught by a card that had fallen from the inside pocket of that coat.

She stooped to pick it up, and, in doing so, glanced down at the face on the card.

"Why, this is my photograph!" she cried, in astonishment. "How did you come to have it?"

"That—er—was part of my work in getting track of you to-night," answered Joe, blushing. "And now, excuse me," he added, quickly, to cover up his red-faced confusion.

Going off a little distance, he sat down to unlace his left shoe.

From that shoe he took the slip of paper.

Replacing his shoe, he went back to Beth.

"Can you see this," he asked, "or shall I strike a match?"

"It's the same paper that I had!" cried the girl. "A precious paper, too! Where did you get it?"

"Archbold and Stokes had it. I got it. Too long a story to tell now," Joe rattled on. "What I'm dying to know is how I can help you out of your trouble, whatever it is."

"You told me that Mrs. Underwood was in the plot against me?" asked Beth, very thoughtfully.

"Yes."

"I half suspected that. I have had reason to suspect her!"

"Who is she? What is she?"

"She was a friend whom my father trusted when he was alive," Beth answered, quietly. "Trusted her too much, by far, for in his will he left her as my guardian, with charge of my fortune."

Archbold telegraphed her, this afternoon, to meet a train to-night, and to bring you along. That telegram is now on file at the Blythe City railway station."

"Oh, the treachery of it!" shuddered the girl.

Then, after a few moments, perceiving the slip of paper that she still held, she murmured:

"This is not safe in my hands. It has been taken from me once. Do you mind keeping it a little longer? I know that you will keep it safe for me."

"Why, of course I'll keep it—at your request," clicked Joe, promptly. "And you can hold me for security."

Retreating, laughing, he again hid the slip in his shoe. This done, he returned to the girl.

"Are you aware that, as yet, I don't even know the name of my friend?" asked the girl, smiling.

"That break is soon mended," laughed Joe, happily. "Joseph Borden—all the time and wholly at your service, Miss Beth Bronson!"

"And you live——"

"In my hat," replied the boy, promptly, and partly from force of habit.

But Beth colored, half afraid that he was poking fun at her.

"I mean," Joe went on, reddening, "the whole wide world is my home. I haven't any spot that I call home, and so I go knocking about from corner to corner of this earth."

"Oh, you poor, unhappy fellow!" cried Beth, sympathetically.

"Oh, I don't know—it ain't so bad after all," cried Joe, warming to a defense of his mode of life. "And this isn't getting down to how I can help you, Miss Bronson. Let me show you how to get at it," he went on, in a brisker, more business-like tone. "That slip of paper, for instance. What's it all about, if you don't mind telling me?"

"I'll have to go back of that, if I'm to tell you anything," murmured Beth. "I guess I'll have to start pretty near the beginning. Well, then, I can hardly remember my mother, I was so young when she died. It was my father, Ephraim Bronson, who brought me up.

"Dad was a good deal interested in western mines, and spent a good deal of his time in Colorado and Montana. Dad had a partner, Jeff Coollidge, who spent all his time in the western mining country.

"Dad died about three years ago, leaving me a very nice fortune, with Mrs. Underwood to look after both myself and the money. I used to hear, every now and then, from Dad's old partner, Jeff, who said he was doing famously well, and that he intended to make me his heiress, too.

"But one day, in a bad streak of speculation, poor old Jeff lost every dollar he had. I felt terribly about it, and if I had controlled my own money I would have set Jeff on his feet again right away. But as it was, I couldn't do anything.

"A few months ago I began to form suspicions that Mrs. Underwood was not honestly caring for my fortune. I asked her about it, and she laughed uneasily, telling me that everything was all right. Still, I didn't believe that it was.

"One day, not long ago, I told her bluntly that when I became of age, or before then, if I married, I should hold her fully accountable for her care of my fortune, and that if she had done anything wrong, she might look for trouble.

"Mrs. Underwood flew into a dreadful passion. An hour later she left the house. I am certain that she went to Blythe City to see Lawyer Archbold, who was often at her house.



"While Mrs. Underwood was gone, that day, Dad's old partner, Jeff, reached the house. He looked like a dying man, and was. Yet he had come all the way from Colorado to see me. He had struck it rich, at last! Away off in one of the loneliest parts of the Colorado mountains Jeff had come upon a claim that he said would make the owner fabulously rich. Yet both the place and the signs of gold were so well hidden that the claim might go for another century without being discovered.

"Too old and too sick to take surveyors back and stake out his claim, and afraid to trust any one with the secret, poor, faithful old Jeff had just time to get to bed on a train, and manage to reach me. After we had a talk that day, he died holding my hand."

Beth's voice shook. Her eyes were wet.

Joe waited, silently, for some moments, before he asked:

"What then, Miss Bronson?"

"With the last strength that Jeff could use in writing," the girl went on, "he traced the writing on that slip which you have. It shows the way to that lonely claim. That little piece of paper, in poor old Jeff's handwriting, is the key to a fortune—a fortune greater than either he or Dad had ever dreamed of!"

"Can you read the key? You understand the cipher?" Joe asked, slowly.

"It is simple enough. The letters and the figures refer to township and section-maps of Colorado. Anyone, with a little puzzling, can figure out the spot that's meant. Why, I've had the map to Colorado, and have placed my pencil mark right on the spot."

Joe started, feeling a wave almost of fear.

Beth Bronson had entrusted him with the whole secret of this immensely valuable mining claim that any one knowing might make his!

The boy gasped. Then, as Beth glanced up at his face, he went on, tremulously:

"Do you realize, Miss Bronson, that you've passed your secret over to me? That I could rob you of that mine, now, if I were wicked enough?"

"But you're not, are you?" asked Beth, calmly.

"Thank Heaven I'm not. But I'm wondering, mightily, Miss Bronson, whether Archbold and Stokes have copied this slip, so that they'll know just where to go and what to do?"

Beth looked at her companion in swift dismay.

"Come to think of it, they haven't a copy," Joe went on, deciding rapidly. "If they had, they wouldn't have tried to get it back from me. Nor would they have gone to the trouble of trying to murder me."

"Murder you?" cried Beth, her voice hollow with horror.

"Oh, it wasn't much," Joe assured her, cheerfully. "One of their crew threw me off a railroad train, to kill me—that was all. And, now I think I understand why I was thrown. That fellow meant to come back and go through me to find the slip. In some way he missed me."

"If Mrs. Underwood really has been using my fortune for herself," Beth broke in, at last, "then you understand

why she wanted to get hold of the mine secret, don't you? If she and Archbold could find that mine and manage it for me, they could undoubtedly steal enough money through operating expenses to pay back what was taken from my fortune, and more besides. But I refused to give up the cipher to the mine, or to let them manage it for me."

"Manage it for you, you poor innocent!" cried Joe.

"How was the mine yours to manage?"

"Why, poor, dear old Jeff gave it to me," Beth replied, innocently.

"He gave you the secret to its location," Joe retorted.

"But he didn't leave you the mine itself. He couldn't. He had never staked it out, and so it didn't belong to him. Had Archbold and Mrs. Underwood ever gotten at the location of that mine, they'd have managed it for themselves. And, Miss Bronson, while I don't know about Mrs. Underwood——"

"You ought to," Beth broke in, smiling. "You carried her to the train at Durango."

"I don't know how big a criminal Mrs. Underwood would be," Joe went on, "but, with less than millions at stake I am certain that Archbold would snuff a girl's life out without pity!"

Again Beth shuddered. Then she rose, clutching lightly at one of Joe's arms.

"I don't believe I'm really a coward," she faltered; "but I don't want to die."

"Of course you don't. Nobody does who has anything worth living for," Joe assured her. "And the only chance of your being murdered——"

He shuddered worse than the girl had done as he spoke the ugly word.

"——would be in case Archbold had reason to think your death would lead to his getting the secret again."

"Then you are sure that he cannot get the secret of the mine, unless he again sees that slip containing the key?"

"If he didn't need the key that we've got," throbbed Joe, "he wouldn't waste any time over you, Miss Beth. He'd pike straight out to Colorado and locate that claim at the government office. Once he had done that he could laugh at you. Make very sure, my dear Beth, that he doesn't know how to find that lonely mine without our help."

For a few moments both were silent.

Then Joe resumed, thoughtfully:

"But nothing is ever likely to make Archbold believe that you can't give him the key to that mine. He'll hound you for it to the end."

"Why couldn't I vanish, and locate the mine myself?" queried the girl.

"Because you're a minor—not of age under the law. Only citizens of age can locate claims."

"But you——"

"I'm not of age, either, Miss Beth. This is the first time I have ever wished that I was past twenty-one."

"But what shall I do?" Beth demanded, looking confidently into her new friend's eyes.



If he had saved her once before, why could he not be trusted to do it again—now?

"I'd hate to give you bad advice, Miss Beth, But, honestly, I don't believe you're safe with Mrs. Underwood."

"Neither do I."

"Then, if you'll let me find you a place of safety, with some good woman——"

"Oh, if you only would!"

"Do you mean it?" queried Joe, delightedly.

"Be sure that I do."

"Then we can fix it—somehow—where you'll be safe for the present," cried Joe, happily. "Safe, while I think and work and scheme in your interests, Miss Beth!"

"Then we won't go back to the train, but further from it?"

Joe was about to answer, when a figure loomed up less than a hundred yards away in the darkness and came hurriedly toward them.

Beth saw, too, and stood rooted with horror.

"Miss Bronson!" called Archbold's voice, "Mrs. Underwood sent me to find you and to say that she wishes to see you at once."

Then, as Archbold got near enough to see our hero's face, the tall man fell back in momentary astoundment.

"You here, boy? You, interfering, as I suspected?" the man raged, a frenzy of wickedness darkening his face.

It was a moment for desperate measures.

Joe Borden whipped out the revolver.

"Run straight up the gully—Beth!" he cried. "Get away from this scound——"

Thump! Archbold's heavy walking stick, thrown by its owner, hit Joe on the temple, downing him.

With an oath Archbold reached forward, snatching up the revolver.

But from the top of the gully sounded the voice of that bearded yeggman, in accents of triumph:

"Catch the gal, fellers! She belongs to the kid that spoiled our job! Give her jest the same as we'll give him, now we've got him!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE AGONY OF DEFEAT.

Beth's sharp scream rang out as she found herself struggling in the grip of the yeggmen.

That scream, which might have brought a hundred men to her rescue, was lost to such hope on account of their distance from the train.

Archbold, from his position a-top of Joe Borden, where the lawyer was hammering the dazed boy, called out, excitedly:

"Is that you, Muggins?"

"Who's calling me?" demanded the astonished voice of the bearded yeggman.

"Archbold."

"That you, 'Squire Archbold?"

"Of course, you blockhead! Come here, quick, and bring that girl with you."

"Pass the dry-goods down this way, Tim," ordered Muggins, himself coming down the gully at a run.

He quickly threw himself upon Joe, relieving the lawyer.

"It's the same kid," snarled Muggins, glaring balefully into Joe's face.

"What same kid?" demanded Archbold.

"The same young feller that spoiled our job o' train-wrecking."

"Muggins," gasped Archbold, his face turning a sickly, dirty white for the instant, "was it you who tried to wreck that train yonder?"

"Course it was," leered Muggins.

"Then, you blockhead, you scoundrel, you came near getting my life into the bargain!"

"Was ye on thet train?" grinned the bearded one.

"Humph! Well, no matter. Nothing happened! I'm safe," uttered the lawyer, with a shrug of his shoulders.

Beth, white and scared, and sobbing bitterly, was now dragged to the spot.

Joe, half knocked out himself, stared at her, his heart aching with pity for her. Indeed, he barely thought of himself.

"Young lady," smiled the lawyer, grimly, "you find that I have a long arm."

"I find, as I had supposed, that you are the associate of criminals," retorted Beth, her wet eyes flashing.

"Softly, child, softly!" warned the lawyer, coldly.

"Sometimes people say so much that it isn't worth while to allow them to live any longer."

Muggins took the hint in a jiffy.

"Say the word, 'squire, and I'll shut off the gal's talk for ye forever."

"Say," uttered the younger yeggman who answered to the name of Tim, as he looked down at helpless Joe, "seems to me them's the same shoes I spoke for jest before the kid bolted from us. What made ye run so, kid? Hate to give up the shoes?"

"Shoes?" repeated Archbold, thoughtfully.

Then, of a sudden, a queer light shone in his eye.

"By all means help yourself to those shoes, Tim. And look in them carefully when you get them off!"

"Oh, Lord! It's all up now with Beth's mine," groaned Joe, inwardly, and turning sick at the thought. "Archbold has just suspected where to look for that paper!"

Archbold turned again to Muggins.

"So train-wrecking is in your line now, is it, my man?"

"To-night's was the first job I ever tried in that line. I'll do better next time."

"Next time," rang a cold, deadly, warning voice; "you'll do the trick behind bars! Up with your hands, every son of you!"

No words can picture the consternation that fell upon four men of that startled group in the gully.

Nor could any words express the wondering delight and joy of Beth Bronson and her champion.

For five new actors on the scene had just stepped out



from the concealment of the shadows under the nearby trees.

These men were armed, and displaying their pistols in a way that foreboded a whole lot of shooting in a moment more.

"Up with your hands!" came the second command, "or we'll save the gallows a job!"

Snarlingly the yeggmen put up their hands.

"Yours, too!" clicked the leader of this new crowd, turning to Archbold.

"Who are you?" demanded the lawyer, haughtily, without obeying.

"Railroad detectives, who just happened to be on that train. Up with your hands!"

"You'll have to excuse me, gentlemen," replied Archbold, with a cool smile. "I am an attorney-at-law, and am sometimes engaged as counsel for your road."

"Don't let him get off that way!" roared Joe, sitting up. "He knows these yeggs, and is one of their accomplices. If you heard him talking just now, you'll know that to be true."

"We heard all the talk," clicked the leader of the detectives. "So put up your hands, counsellor. If you don't, you'll have all your arguments stopped for the future by a bullet."

The menacing one stepped straight forward toward Archbold, with blood written in his eye.

"You'll regret this!" quivered the lawyer.

"All right, then," said the detective, cheerily, as he watched Archbold's hands go up with a grim, approving smile. "We'll do all our regretting at the nearest police station. Sam, pass around the handcuffs."

"You're not going to handcuff me?" raged Archbold, turning white, and shaking.

"Yes, sirree!"

"I'll fight, first!"

"No, you won't! I'll kill you if you make the first false move!"

Archbold found himself looking into the muzzle of that revolver at a distance of less than two feet.

Groaning, cursing, Archbold submitted to the—terrible indignity.

The yeggmen took their medicine more coolly.

"I shall be able to explain matters before the first magistrate I meet," groaned out Archbold, frostily.

"All right, then, friend!" smiled the leader of the detectives. "Now, then, Sam, all your birds caged?"

"Yes, sir."

"Gentlemen, we will escort our friends of the darkness to the nearest police station," laughed the detective, delightedly.

He was shaking hands with himself, that chap, over the neatness and handiness of this catch.

It meant a great feather in the cap of these railroad crook-catchers.

Yet, in the midst of his jubilation the head detective did not forget to be gentle to womankind.

"Young lady," remarked this man, whom the other detectives addressed as "Mr. Foss," "we are delighted to have been of such timely service to you and your friend."

"No more delighted than I was to see your friendly faces!" cried Beth.

"It seems a shame," went on Foss, "that we should have to ask you, young lady, to go with us at all as witnesses against these wretches. But, as you heard their confession of their crime, your testimony will be highly important."

Beth and Joe exchanged dismayed glances.

Our hero had hoped to be able to get Beth off somewhere where not even her name would be known, and where she would be safe, for the present, under some good, motherly woman.

But Joe tried to cover up his confusion by remarking:

"When that gang had me, I never looked for the coming of anyone like you."

"Why, we were on our way down the road, on that train, to report to division headquarters in the morning," explained the elated Foss. "When we found out what was up we all piled out and went searching through these parts to see if we could come across any of the crooks who had tried the train-wrecking. But we should have gone right by here, if it hadn't been for the young lady's screams. Hearing her voice, and feeling sure, after a moment, that she was in no immediate danger, we closed in softly, and heard what was being said before we pounced out from cover and made these very lucky arrests. Do you know these prisoners?"

Foss asked this last question in an undertone.

They were well behind the other detectives and the prisoners.

"I know that lawyer chap," Joe nodded.

"He's a real lawyer, then?"

"Yes; but a disgrace to his job," cried Joe, with angry vehemence. "He doesn't have regular cases, from what I hear, but has a dark side line of shady, queer practice."

"I know the breed, then," murmured Detective Foss, nodding his head knowingly. "Glad we've got him, and hope we'll be able to hold him. But these shady lawyers are terrors at slicking themselves out of fixes that would hang other men."

Foss went ahead, for a moment, to look at the manacles on the wrists of his prisoners.

"Isn't it dreadful?" murmured Beth in our hero's ears.

"I can't get away and keep out of sight. I must be on hand to testify against these wretches."

"You would have to testify, if you were on hand," nodded Joe, speaking in a very low tone.

"What do you mean?"

"Miss Beth, if you're quick, and gritty, we can give these fellows the slip, I believe. Then, when I've got you where you're safe, I'm willing to come back, myself, and testify."

"But they'd make you tell where I was," whispered Beth tremulously still.

"Would they?" retorted Joe, drily. "Could they?"



They had crossed the hill, had left the fields behind, now, and were out on a country road.

Foss appeared to know just where the nearest police station in this country district was to be found, and was leading the way.

The present road led up a slight incline. At the left a gully stretched back from the road through a forest.

"All ready, Beth!" whispered the boy, suddenly.

He caught her hand strongly.

Beth looked at him in surprise, but not in alarm.

"Back of this tree," he whispered. "Down the slope—so!"

"They were down in the gully, racing fleet-footedly along its length.

Before long they came out on a country by-path.

"They'll never find us, now," grinned Joe.

"But wasn't it wrong to run away?" asked Beth, anxiously, as they walked at slower pace along this path.

"Wrong?" Joe demanded, with dignity. "If it was, do you think I'd have done it?"

"No, no, of course not," murmured Beth.

Joe smiled to himself when he found that point settled.

"You see, Beth, if you show up as a witness in this case Mrs. Underwood will know where to find you. You can wager she's wondering with all her might just where you are now. If she could find you, in the morning, she could take you into her charge again, couldn't she?"

"Yes!" shuddered Beth. "She's my legal guardian."

"And she could hire someone to watch over you and see that you didn't get away again. Then you can imagine the way you'd be tormented by Archbold and his crowd."

"But Archbold has been arrested."

"Yes; and the chances are that he'll have a country magistrate routed out of bed, and be loose in an hour. In any case he'll be free in the morning. Now, Beth, we've got to find out what can be done for you. There's something—there must be—and we're going to put up a warm, genuine fight for your rights. But we've got to plan it over carefully, and the chances are that we've got to have some money."

"Money?" echoed the girl, sadly. "I can't get any except through Mrs. Underwood."

"But I can," promised Joe, stoutly. "I can get money from home."

"From home?" asked Beth, in a puzzle.

"Yes! Think of all the money there is in the world! The world is my home, you know, Beth, and I'm going to get some more money out of the world before long. It may take weeks, or months, and I'll have to go abroad and hustle for it—but I'll get it!"

"But what's going to become of me?" faltered Beth.

"You are going to find a nice, quiet, safe, secluded little boarding place. I shall leave you there as soon as I'm sure you're in good hands."

"But I can't pay any board," Beth objected.

"I can!"

"But I—I don't want you to," protested the girl, looking troubled.

"Why not?" demanded Joe. "I'm going to be your business agent in this, Beth. I'm going to put up what money's needed now, and find some more money. I'm going to push you through to success with that claim, and then you can settle with me—generously!"

Beth smiled into his eyes, as if in earnest of how generous she would be, in the hour of success, with this big-hearted, unselfish champion of hers.

An hour later, in another village, Joe succeeded in rousing a man with an automobile.

Between then and daylight the machine carried them over thirty miles of ground.

At daylight the young pair boarded a trolley car. Joe directed a change of cars and routes four or five times.

While the morning was still young, Joe Borden found the place for which he was looking—a safe retreat for Beth, who would be the only boarder with a quiet, refined, motherly woman named Bliss.

Representing Beth as his sister, Joe left a substantial sum with Mrs. Bliss, then turned for his good-bye to Beth.

"It may be a little while before you see me, but not long," he murmured, as he held her hand at parting. "Keep yourself away from the public eye. Keep quiet until I come back with something like real plans. And now I'm off, to scheme, and hustle, and fight!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### JOE PLAYS FOXY.

"I thought so," chuckled the boy.

Joe's feet were treading, again, the streets of "Little Old New York."

It was a week since he had left Beth.

Not a tremendously busy week had it proved, but it counted, for it told him what he wanted to know about Archbold and that crew.

In the first place, after leaving Beth, Joe had gone back by swift express train to appear as a witness for the railroad against the yeggmen.

There was some disappointment with Foss over the disappearance of the girl, but at the same time there were witnesses enough without her.

So Joe had not been forced to divulge her whereabouts.

In court, that morning, he stood prepared to tell the whole story of his meeting and dealings with the yeggmen.

But the case was adjourned for two weeks.

Lawyer Archbold had, of course, been released that same morning.

From court Joe had gone direct to the railway station.

He appeared to be in a tremendous hurry, but that was purely for the benefit of those who, he was sure, Archbold would have on his trail.

The train had borne Joe direct to Chicago, seventy miles away.



On the train our hero made sure that he was being shadowed by Barrows, disguised.

"He hopes I'm going to lead the way to Beth," smiled the boy.

In a State Street drug-store, by stepping back of the counter as if for a moment only, and then handing a clerk a dollar bill for piloting him out through the back-yard, Joe shook Barrows from his trail.

Within the next hour Joe was whirling across several states to New York City.

This move, again, was to enable him to learn what he wanted to know of the enemy.

For two or three days our hero went about seeing the sights.

Then, going to a newspaper office, he told such an interesting story of his wanderings that he got himself written up in that newspaper.

The article had reached Chicago.

There had been just about time for a train to get in from Chicago, and now Joe was posted in the public library where, according to the newspaper reporter, our hero spent most of his time when in New York.

Crouching down in his chair, his face hidden behind a big book, Joe covertly watched the new arrivals in the library.

It was, he knew, about half an hour after the arrival of the last train from Chicago.

A man bearded, and behind green goggles, came into the great reading room, wandering about slowly, looking at the desks, the books, and the people.

Joe, without appearing to, studied his man, closely.

"I thought so," he muttered, again. "Barrows, the same fellow I slipped in Chicago. I wonder if he's alone? No; most likely not. After the way Barrows got fooled the other day Archbold isn't likely to trust him alone. Well, the bait has been caught. Now, I'll land my fish!"

Yet this was something that the boy didn't seem in any hurry about doing.

He read on, for some fifteen minutes, purposely tiring the patience of the begoggled wretch, who, from one of the nearby desks, was watching him.

While reading, our hero started a conversation, at odd moments, with the man seated next to him.

"Well," smiled Joe, at last, "I've got to stop reading for to-day. Got pleasanter business on hand. A call to make."

"Judging by your face," smiled Joe's neighbor, "it's a young lady."

"Why, perhaps it is," laughed Joe.

He returned his book to the desk, then strolled out of the library, well aware that the man behind green goggles—Barrows, the same who had thrown him from the train—was close in his wake.

Out on the street Joe walked unconcernedly along.

He knew that Barrows was behind him in the crowd. He knew, also, that a cab on the street had started behind him, and that the horse was being walked just fast enough to keep our hero in sight of the driver.

"I don't need a look into that cab," grinned the boy, inwardly. "I know without looking. Archbold is in there. Now, that answers all I want to know. In the first place, that crew haven't discovered where Beth is. As soon as they read that newspaper yarn, with careful directions for finding me, Archbold and Barrows hustled on to New York. They thought I had Beth here in hiding. The other thing that I know, now, is that Archbold didn't have that paper long enough to make a copy of it or puzzle out its meaning. So he's still hot on the trail of the whole business. Well, now!"

Smiling, Joe halted on a street corner, looking carelessly about him. He did not attempt to look at Barrows, but he saw him, nevertheless, talking to someone in the cab, which had drawn up at the curb.

"I guess I'll go and see Beth," Joe Borden grinned. "That's what that pair are expecting me to do."

He stepped into a florist's shop and ordered a bouquet. Some time he spent in directing the florist's efforts.

But when, at last, that bouquet was done, it looked fit for presentation to a queen.

"That'll satisfy the enemy as to where I'm going, I guess," murmured Joe.

Now, out on the street again, with the tissue-covered bouquet in one hand, Joe walked down a side street where the houses were all residences.

He ran up the steps of one of the houses, rang the bell, A girl opened the door. Lifting his hat, Joe stepped inside, closing the door himself.

His face was all smiles as he turned to the surprised girl.

"See here," beamed Joe, holding out a five-dollar bill, "this is a little trick I'm playing on some friends. All I want you to do is to take me down to the back yard, where I can get over the fence and away. If anybody rings the bell and inquiries, please don't give 'em any satisfaction."

"It must be a good joke, to be worth that much," laughed the girl.

"It is," smiled Joe, as he followed her downstairs. "I'll win the bet, if you help me by keeping quiet. What number is this? Forty-seven? I'll remember. If you help me out well to-day, I'll be back again as soon as I can make the bet again."

Promising to be "smart," the girl led him into the back-yard, watched him scramble over the back fence into an open lot, and then went back into the house.

Joe having shaken pursuit, caught the first hansom he saw. He reached the Grand Central Depot just in time to find himself seated in a Pullman car as the Chicago express pulled out.

"Just at this moment," laughed the boy, quietly to himself, "I reckon there's a close but puzzled watch on that house that I vanished into. And inside of another hour, I reckon, Mrs. Rachael Underwood will be answering a telegram by hustling east to come and claim her ward! Oh, that's good! Worth all the days that it took to work it right! Luncheon?" he repeated, looking up at the white-aproned



waiter, who held out a meal list to him. "Luncheon? You bet! I'm hungry enough to eat a ton!"

"These are not an interesting-looking lot of passengers," Joe decided during the afternoon. "I don't believe there'll be much excitement on this trip."

The only passenger who caught Joe's eye at all was a stout elderly man, with a firm face and hard-set jaws.

"He looks like a capitalist, a money-king," decided Joe. "Probably some big man in the money-world. But there's nothing interesting or exciting about him. This'll be a dull trip."

The train was still a few hours out from Chicago in the morning.

Several of the men who had seats in the car were forward in the Pullman smoker.

Joe, after yawning a while, decided to go forward into the smoker.

Mr. Money-bags was there, among others. In the chair next to him was a spruce-looking man of thirty, who was chatting with the older man.

Mr. Money-bags, having just finished a cigar, was about to ring for another, but the spruce-looking man held out one.

"Try this, Mr. Arnold," he urged. "You'll find it better than anything you can get on the train."

With a nod of thanks Mr. Arnold placed the cigar-end between his lips, and lighted the weed.

There was nothing out of the usual about this.

"Even if the young fellow is a confidence man," murmured Joe, "old Money-bags looks able to take care of himself."

So Joe bought a comic paper, and was reading through it lazily when he saw two or three men leap up from their seats.

Mr. Arnold, breathing heavily, his eyes closed, lay on the floor of the car.

"Gentlemen," cried the old man's late companion, "won't you please hurry through the train to find a physician. This is one of Mr. Arnold's regular heart attacks. We are always greatly worried when they happen."

While two or three passengers started hurriedly through the train, others, under the direction of the spruce young man, made as comfortable a bed as they could on the floor for the stricken millionaire.

Joe, seeing no need of his services, was watching, quietly, but with keen eyes.

A physician came, pronounced Mr. Arnold seriously ill, and did all he could to restore the old man to consciousness.

"Do all you can for him, doctor. Money is no object," urged the young man, in a voice so anxious that it trembled.

Then the spruce young man reached down Mr. Arnold's top-coat and picked up the old man's satchel.

He turned, as if to start back into the car where the stricken man's seat was.

But now Joe Borden broke to the front.

"Hold on," suggested our hero, laying a rather heavy

hand on the arm of the spruce young man. "Where are you going with that coat and bag?"

"Back to Mr. Arnold's seat with them, if it's any of your business," retorted the spruce one, looking angrily at the boy.

"What right have you to move those articles?"

"Right?" gasped the spruce one, with well-pretended amazement. "Right? I'm Mr. Arnold's private secretary."

"Does he know it?" asked Joe, quietly.

"What do you mean?"

Now a second man, right behind young Borden, whispered warningly:

"Keep out of this! If you don't, it'll cost you your life!"

"I'm used to that," spoke Joe, unconcernedly, and aloud, as he turned full upon the whisperer.

"Did you address me?" asked this second man, in well-pretended surprise.

"Not particularly," returned the boy, with a shrug of his shoulders. "But you, young-man-with-the-bag, you'd better put it back where you found it. You say you're the private secretary——"

"I am. Armstrong is my name."

"Well, Mr. Armstrong, when this old man is unconscious is a bad time to move his particular property. If you attempt to take it out of the car I shall appeal to the conductor and the other passengers. You claim to be the employee of the sick man, but no one here knows that you ever saw Mr. Arnold before this morning."

"I know him to be the man he says he is," boldly put in the man who had just threatened our hero.

"You?" demanded Joe, turning upon the second fellow. "Why, you're the fellow who just threatened my life if I didn't keep quiet. Gentlemen"—and by this term our hero addressed all the curious passengers who were crowding about—"I think you will all agree with me that this bag and overcoat ought to remain here in the car until this sick man comes to and identifies his secretary. You will notice that the train is slowing up for a stop. What would happen if the sick man should come to in half an hour, only to find that two glib strangers had gotten away with his valuable property?"

"Right!" nodded the conductor, himself taking the bag and the coat. "These things stay here until the gentleman comes to."

Though Armstrong and his companion protested loudly, Joe observed that they took no more interest in the sick man.

As soon as the stop was made at the station, the pair vanished swiftly.

By and by the physician brought the sick man around, though the latter was still weak.

And now the sufferer was asked about his private secretary.

"Secretary?" gasped Mr. Arnold. "I didn't have one with me."



The physician explained how Joe had prevented the lifting of the coat and bag.

"Tried to steal it, did they?" shrieked the old man, who was now seated in a chair. "Hand me that bag at once!"

The physician helped him to unlock the satchel.

After nervously fumbling inside, Mr. Arnold announced: "Everything is all right. But that was a lucky escape."

Then the conductor presented Joe.

"Young man," said Arnold, weakly, "you've got both the grit and the brains. We'll be in Chicago soon. I wish you would come with me as far as my home. Then I'll know that I'm to get there safely."

Arrived at Chicago, Joe and the physician attended to getting Mr. Arnold to his home in a cab.

It was a handsome mansion into which the strangers were ushered.

While the physician went to Mr. Arnold's own rooms with him, Joe was asked to wait in the library.

Here, within a quarter of an hour, Joe was confronted by a young man who smiled gravely at him.

"I am Mr. Taylor, Mr. Arnold's real secretary," came the announcement.

"How is Mr. Arnold, after his heart attack?" queried Joe.

"Heart attack?" smiled Taylor. "I never knew him to have one. He is a thoroughly healthy man. He was drugged on the train—drugged by means of a cigar."

"I thought it was a scheme something like that," nodded the boy.

"Naturally, Mr. Arnold feels that he can never thank you enough. Of course you don't know what was in that satchel, and there is no need of telling you. But, that you have performed a great service for my employer may best be proved by the fact that he has directed me to hand you this."

"This" proved to be a little pile of ten one-hundred dollar bills.

"I expected something like this," Joe smiled to himself. "When a fellow is after money on his travels, it pays to travel first-class. There's always more money in the Pullman cars."

He thanked Taylor and his employer heartily, then asked for the address of a reliable lawyer.

To that address Joe went in a cab. Crossing the city in this fashion there was less danger of being recognized.

He found the lawyer, had a satisfactory talk, then took the cab again, this time to a railway station.

It was late in the afternoon when Joe left Chicago.

It was mid-evening when he knocked at the door of the house where Beth was passing these days.

## CHAPTER IX.

### TRAPPED.

"You?" cried Beth, her face wreathed in delighted smiles, as she entered the little parlor, holding out her hand.

"I'm back earlier than I had hoped," Joe replied. "That's because, accidentally, I got the money that I needed."

"You do everything that you start to do," cried Beth, admiringly.

"What's the use of failing?" asked Joe, drily. "The big men in any line are big just because they don't fail as often as other people."

Mrs. Bliss, who, at Joe's request, had followed Beth into the parlor, laughed.

"I've heard a good deal about the way you don't fail, Mr. Borden," announced the landlady.

"Oh, it's never safe to brag," replied Joe, modestly. "Once in a while I step on a banana peel."

"What do you do that for?" asked the rather slow-witted landlady.

"Oh, just to show that I'm human," Joe returned.

Beth laughed merrily.

Then, as Joe did not appear in a hurry to make any announcement, she inquired:

"What have you been doing?"

"Enjoying myself," the boy smiled.

"That's what you live for, isn't it?"

"That and excitement," he admitted.

"You'd better settle down, then," hinted the landlady.

"Get a nice position and live as other folks do."

"It would be awfully dull!" protested the boy who lived in his hat.

"Some day some young lady will change your mind, and make you settle down," announced Mrs. Bliss, triumphantly.

Joe chatted for some minutes as if he had nothing out of the usual on his mind.

Beth, though anxious to know what was coming, asked no more questions.

"Sister Beth," began Joe, suddenly, "do you realize that we are a pair of infants?"

"Of course you are," broke in the talkative landlady. "All children are infants under the law until they're twenty-one."

"In what way have we been infants?" Beth queried.

"Well, you were afraid of your guardian, Mrs. Underwood."

"I still am afraid of her," Beth confessed, making a wry face.

"You don't need to be."

"Why not?"

"Why, there's a little point of law that neither of us ever happened to know about. A minor who is over fourteen is allowed to choose his own guardian. If he has one he doesn't trust, he, or she, can petition the court to appoint a new guardian. In almost every case it is done when the minor makes the request and furnishes any reason that's a bit of good."

"And I can get out of Mrs. Underwood's clutches?" cried the girl.

"So I'm told by the lawyer that I consulted in Chicago this morning."



"And then Mrs. Underwood would be obliged to turn over my fortune to the new guardian?"

"Every penny of it. And she'd have trouble over any money she couldn't account for."

"How do I go about such a step?" Beth demanded, eagerly.

"You're going to Chicago with me to-morrow morning. The lawyer there will attend to the rest. Mrs. Bliss, will you be ready to go with Miss Bronson? You'll be paid, of course."

The landlady, who had not been in Chicago for years, gladly agreed to a trip at someone else's expense.

"Then, if Mrs. Bliss can give me a room here to-night," suggested Joe, "I shall be on hand for the start in the morning."

During Mrs. Bliss's brief absence from the room, Beth whispered:

"But how about the claim in Colorado?"

"The enemy aren't on the track of that yet, so I don't believe they will be. I've a plan for taking care of that claim as soon as you have a new guardian appointed."

"Oh, dear," sighed the girl. "I'm sorry you're not of age."

"Oh, there are plenty of good guardians to be found," Joe laughed. "But as to that claim, it's open and belongs to anybody who finds it. The great trouble, if we go to locate that claim, is to keep Archbold and his imps off our trail."

"But I can't get ownership of a mining claim until I'm twenty-one, can I?" murmured the girl.

"At eighteen, if you're married," Joe informed her.

"But even that is almost two years away."

"There's another way to get it for you," Joe went on.

He was about to explain, but Mrs. Bliss moved into the room.

So our hero's eyes carried to Beth the silent message:

"Wait and trust me! It's all right."

Beth nodded, and was content.

After that, dropping all talk of Beth's affairs, the young people spent the evening as any young pair might, while Mrs. Bliss sat knitting in a corner of the room.

By degrees Beth's face, from laughing, became sad.

Joe teased her about it.

"I can't help it," murmured the girl. "I've begun to feel blue, all of a sudden."

"You don't do that often, do you?" Joe asked, wonderingly.

"Seldom, very seldom; but to-night a great dread seems to be coming over me."

"Oh, nonsense!" cheered Joe. "We're just about at the end of our difficulties. To-morrow, you'll see how different things will look."

"I hope so," murmured the girl, her eyes studying the pattern of the carpet.

Then, suddenly, she looked up, startled.

For Joe, from staring at one of the windows, had suddenly risen to go toward it.

Instantly, there came a deafening crash. A jet of flame shot into the room under the raised sill of that window.

"Oh, Jupiter!" moaned Joe, sharply.

For an instant he stood still, both his hands flying to his forehead.

Then he turned blindly, reeled, plunged—fell to the floor without another word.

With a scream Beth flung herself forward, staring wildly at her prostrate champion.

From the center of Joe's forehead trickled a heavy stream of crimson.

"They've shot him—killed him!" screamed Beth, and fell fainting to the floor beside Joe!

## CHAPTER X.

### QUICK WORK.

Mrs. Bliss did not faint.

But, with a shriek she darted from the room, too scared for anything but flight.

Darting upstairs, in her unreasoning terror, that good woman hid herself.

In a twinkling the front door was pushed open.

Two young men rushed into the room.

They were the same with whose crooked work Joe had meddled on the train.

For just an instant they stood looking at Borden and the still girl.

"If he could understand things now, he'd know that we weren't bluffing when we advised him to keep out," murmured one of the pair, in a low voice.

"Who's the girl?"

"Some sweetheart of his."

"Great Scott, Dick! Nothing of the sort."

"What—"

"Look at her!"

"Well?"

"Don't you see, man? That's the girl whose picture Archbold showed us—the girl, for some reason, that he's moving heaven and earth to find."

"Thunder! This is lucky!"

"It is, if we get away with her in time."

Both of the assassins bent over the girl.

"Hardly breathing," announced one of the pair. "She'll be minutes in this yet."

"Then help me get her to the cab."

"What, then?"

"Back to this chap."

"But we don't want to take him with us."

"No; but he must be the same fellow that's been giving Archbold so much trouble. In that case, we want to look well inside his shoes."

"I understand! Yes; he must be the same fellow."

"Hold the door open, then, while I carry the girl. Come along with me. That fellow'll wait until we want him."

As one bore Beth's still form out into the yard, the other ran ahead to throw the door of the cab that stood at the curb.



"No one stirring on this quiet street," muttered one of the pair, as they dropped limp Beth on a seat inside the cab. "Now, back to look in that youngster's shoes."

But that corpse, the instant that it was left alone, had acted in a most unaccountable fashion.

The instant that his enemies passed through the doorway with Beth Joe sat up swiftly.

Winking one eye at the wall, he stole out into the dark hallway.

Here they were, coming back.

There was another room, off the hallway at the other side, and in darkness.

With a quick twist of the doorknob, Joe slipped into this dark room, halting just by the door with his hand on the uncaught knob.

Into the parlor trod the two assassins, looking for their victim.

"Thunder!"

"Who did it?" gasped the other crook.

"We've been tricked. He wasn't killed."

"But that bullet-hole in his forehead——"

"Some trick. Quick! There he goes now!"

Joe's flying feet could be heard on the gravel outside.

His two enemies reached the front door of the cottage just in time to see Joe, after a convulsive look inside the cab, fairly leap for the driver's box.

Slash! That whip came down with cruel force on the horse's back.

"Here! Stop!"

"We'll shoot!"

The clatter of hoofs, the roll of wheels chimed in well with Joe's taunting voice that floated back:

"Shoot, and be—blessed!"

Joe and outfit were headed like lightning down the street, in a mad rattle and jangle of livery belongings.

Realizing that their adversary had gotten out of range of pocket pistols, neither of the desperadoes fired.

"Beat it, Dick!" chattered one to the other. "Sprint!"

"We can't catch him!" panted the other, as the pair broke into a dead run.

"Perhaps not unless he has an accident—a breakdown!"

But Joe, guiding the horses swiftly, though with a cautious hand, was taking splendid care that he did not have a breakdown.

In leaving the cottage behind his first mad thought had been to dash for the railway station.

But the next second's thought told him that late trains would not stop at this little village.

On a broad, firm highway, at last, Joe felt that this road must lead to some larger town in the distance.

Yet, between the gallop and the fast trot, he showed this pair of horses little mercy until three miles had been covered.

In all that time the boy had passed not a single vehicle.

But now the flagging gates of the animals told him that he must make at least a brief halt.

So he reined up at the roadside.

Then he leaped down, wheeling and reaching out for the cab door.

"Beth!" he cried, anxiously, pulling the door open.

Inside there was a flutter of feminine clothing, then a tremulous voice cried out:

"Oh, Joe!"

Beth sprang forward. Two impulsive arms found their way around his neck.

"Oh, Joe, I'm so glad they didn't kill you!"

"They would have," laughed the boy, coolly. "Only I happened to see that muzzle just in time to dodge aside the second before the fellow pressed the trigger. A miss is as good as a mile, you know, Beth!"

"A miss! With that great ugly wound still gaping and bleeding in your forehead!" shuddered the girl.

"Is it?" demanded Joe, calmly. "We'll stop it then."

With his handkerchief he gave his forehead a vigorous rubbing.

"There! Is it all right now?" he wanted to know, presenting his forehead for inspection.

Beth stared as if she believed herself to be dreaming.

For, now, his forehead was wholly innocent of wound, or the sign of one.

"What fearful nightmare has this been, then!" she shuddered, pressing her hands over her eyes.

But Joe, catching her hands and drawing them away, made her look at him.

"There's nothing wonderful or strange about it, Beth girl," he laughed, gleefully. "It's just a little trick of the actors that I ran across once. Haven't you ever, at the theater, seen an actor reel and fall, and then afterwards show the bleeding wound on his forehead, or over his heart?"

"Yes; of course," Beth nodded, almost dumbly.

"Beth, I've been shot at lately, and also threatened with being shot. Before I left Chicago it struck me it might be worth while to have something to play 'possum' with, if I got mixed up in any shooting. So I stopped in a drug-store and had some wounds put up."

"Wounds?" repeated the girl, amazed.

"Sure thing," nodded Joe, cheerfully. "Just thin, soft wax capsules filled with red stuff, to look like blood. The wax itself is flesh-colored. When you clap your hand to your head, or over your heart, you mash the wax capsule against yourself. Then the crimson begins to flow. It's an easy fake. See, I have six of them left. Want to see how one works?"

But Beth strove to force him to return the pasteboard box to his pocket.

"I haven't gotten over the fright of seeing the last one work yet," she cried, tremulously.

"It was queer," Joe went on, smilingly. "I just happened to have one of these 'wounds' out of the box, and in my pocket, when I rose to look at that window. Say, wasn't the rest easy?"

"But my heart bumped when I heard you faint beside me," the boy added, regretfully.



"I didn't faint," Beth replied, very demurely.

"You didn't?"

"I didn't lose myself for an instant."

"It was a mighty good imitation, then."

"That's just what it was," Beth laughed, her eyes twinkling.

"Trust a girl to throw a trick faint, any time," uttered Joe, grimly. "But why did you do it, Beth?"

"So as not to draw unwelcome attention to myself."

"But when they picked you up to carry you out——"

"I was ready to go, then," Beth answered, with a flash of fire in her eyes.

"Ready to go?" echoed dazed Joe. "Why?"

"So that I could keep with the murderers, as I thought them, until I could denounce them to the officers!"

"Jupiter! Great Jupiter!"

Joe gazed at this quiet, jolly, sunny-faced girl with ever-increasing admiration.

"So Archbold found us out, even hidden where I was?" Beth shivered, an instant later.

"He didn't send those fellows there for us, Beth," Joe replied. "They belong to his crowd, that's all. Crooks, probably, whom Archbold, as a slick lawyer, often helps to keep out of jail. No; they weren't looking for you there, but they recognized us both."

"Then how——"

"Wait just a moment, dear girl. I want to look at the horses and see if they're fit to go ahead."

Joe came back in a twinkling.

"There's a lot of go left in those animals yet. Want to ride on the box with me, Beth?"

She gave him her hand, laughingly, to be helped up beside him.

"This is going to be mighty cozy," nodded Joe, with satisfaction. "Now, we can talk as we drive along."

He told Beth, unreservedly, now, all that had happened to him since he had first left her with Mrs. Bliss.

Beth, on her side, had next to nothing to tell him.

"It seems strange, doesn't it," she asked, "to be riding through the United States like this, and almost afraid for our lives?"

"Anyone can be afraid who has the Archbold crowd after him," muttered young Borden. "I never before heard of a gang as bad as this one. Archbold must be a good deal more than just a slick lawyer for crooks. He must lead an organization of the most desperate men out of prison."

Their drive was without further adventure.

A few miles further on they reached a large town.

From here they were able, almost at once, to board a train for Chicago.

"We've got to leave the horses standing where they are," muttered Joe, as he led the girl toward the train. "People who let out cabs to fellows like the ones who had that cab must take their chances of ever seeing their rig again."

It was after one in the morning when they reached Chicago.

"I don't look for trouble now, Beth," whispered the boy,

as they drove away from the depot in a cab. "Still, I'm going to take you to one of the biggest hotels in town, to the Auditorium. We ought to be safe there, if anywhere in Chicago. I'll have the clerk wake one of the housekeepers to share your room with you, so that you'll be looked after. And in the morning—off for the lawyer's office. Then, I hope, dear girl, your troubles will be done with."

At the great Auditorium, Beth was soon installed, with one of the hotel's keepers for her chaperone.

But Joe, though he engaged a room for himself, felt anything but sleepy.

"I'm wild-eyed from the dizzy pace of excitement that I've been traveling," he told himself, grimly, as he strolled restlessly up and down the big lobby. "If I keep on, I'll soon be in some quiet bug-house retreat. But what a brick of a girl Beth is! She's worth a heap more trouble than I've had on her account!"

"I wonder if Archbold and Mrs. Underwood are scouring New York in search of Beth and me!" grinned the boy. "But Archbold will get a telegram some time tonight that will tell him where to look for us. Thank heaven, New York is so far from Chicago that he can't make the trip before we get to the lawyer tomorrow. And after the morning, I'll try to see if I can't get the lawyer to receive Beth into his own home for the present. That ought to be a good, safe place for her—if any place is safe against Archbold and his crew of rascals!"

Outside a cab had drawn up, a few yards below the entrance.

A man and a woman came toward the door, but suddenly the man, looking inside, drew his companion back out of the range of light.

"We're in luck!" chuckled the man.

"What?"

"Don't get forward into the light, but just peer in and get a glimpse of the young man seated, all by himself, against the lobby wall over there."

"Well?" questioned the woman, after looking.

"That's the very fellow we're looking for!"

"You don't mean——"

"That meddlesome, gritty, lucky youngster—the boy who lives in his hat—Joe Borden!" whispered Lawyer Archbold, triumphantly.

His companion, Mrs. Underwood, who did not remember to have seen the boy, leaned forward and peered again.

"I'll take you around to the ladies' entrance," whispered the lawyer, drawing his companion away. "You can go up into the ladies' parlor and get your room."

"And you?"

"I shall need no room tonight," barked the lawyer, savagely, "I shall be awake tonight. So shall my wits! I've got to take this lucky chance to stifle that boy forever!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### GOLD-BRICKED.

But Joe, though he did not turn his head noticeably, had seen his enemy.



Instantly, all the old love of fight and clever adventure, surged up in the youngster who lived in his hat.

Joe, with his eyes half-closed, and seemingly gazing dreamily at the wall opposite, began to resolve plans in his mind.

"So mine enemy won't have to be called over from New York. He's here already—and knows I'm here! There ought to be something interesting happen before morning."

Joe began to sharpen his wits.

"Archbold won't attack me in the hotel lobby, or send anyone else on the job," murmured the young schemer to himself. "While I stay here I'll be safe. But I don't want to be too safe after this. So far Archbold has kept himself away from any evidence that would put him behind bars. Yet I shall never be wholly safe until he does go to living on the other side of prison bars. He isn't the kind of man ever to forget a grudge."

After thinking busily, without a definite plan, Joe decided to wait where he was, doing nothing, for the present.

"That will force Archbold to show his own mind, if he's going to get impatient tonight."

But an hour dragged by. It was now nearly three o'clock in the morning, yet there was no sign of any plan of campaign on the part of the lawyer.

"Blazes!" uttered the boy, incredulously. "I wonder if he's going to let me sit here until morning, and nothing doing?"

Even at this hour of the night there were many passers-by on the street. Chicago never sleeps.

Yawning, at last, Joe rose and sauntered towards the entrance.

Outside, he saw nothing suspicious—Nothing to indicate that Archbold had ordered his young adversary watched.

"What does it mean?" puzzled Joe. "Is he really afraid to have me tackled in a public place like this?"

It certainly seemed as if either the lawyer had abandoned all thoughts of attack for the present, or else he was playing a far deeper game than the boy could fathom.

A policeman came along, swinging his club lazily.

Espying Joe, he sauntered toward the hotel entrance.

"Turning day into night?" asked the cop, with a grin.

"No," Joe smiled. "Simply don't feel a whole lot like sleep—that is all."

"I envy you, then," gasped the officer, hiding a yawn behind his hand. "I'm so drowsy I'd give a day's pay for a nap."

"Perhaps I'd be sleepy if I had to stay awake," laughed Joe.

"I've been thinking of hiring a messenger boy to walk around with me and keep me awake," gaped the policeman, hiding another yawn behind his sleeve. "Only I'm afraid (gape) that the boy might be so sleepy himself that (gape) I'd have to work to keep him walking."

"How far is your beat?" asked Joe.

"Two blocks down that way, and one block up the other," replied the cop, pointing.

"Just that short beat?"

"That's all."

"I should think it would make you drowsy," sympathized Joe, "going back and forth over the same paving blocks all night."

"Take a stroll down to the end of the post with me?" invited the cop, swinging his stick, lazily.

"Sure!" nodded Joe.

It would not take long. Apparently, after all, there would be nothing else doing this night that was nearing its end.

"Not much crime around this part of the town, eh?" asked Joe, as they walked, the policeman trying doors as he went along.

"Not enough to keep a feller awake," grumbled the man in blue. "A good street fight, now—that might have a good, rousing effect."

Joe himself began to gape, from the force of the other's habit.

"Look at all these fine stores," grumbled the cop. "And not a burglar trying to break into one of 'em! Not a bit of excitement on this beat. I wish I was back on the old stockyards beat!"

They had gone more than a block away now, or nearly to the end of the officer's beat in that direction.

But suddenly the policeman stopped, with something like a look of interest.

They had come upon a basement door just ajar.

"Crooks at work?" whispered the policeman, questionly.

"Hope so—for your sake," returned Joe, dryly.

"Nit! Nothing of the sort! Nothing but carelessness," retorted the policeman, disgustedly. "Just a chance to report that I found a door open and closed it. Rats! Wait a second, and I'll be up."

Heavily the policeman descended the basement steps, then tried the door.

"Have you seen one of these new, patent, self-closing locks?" called up the officer.

"I don't know as I know the kind you mean," Joe replied.

"Come down and take a look at it before I close the door."

Nimbly Borden ran down the stairs.

It was dark down there.

"Strike a match, and get a good look," advised the cop.

But Joe, instead, bent forward over the lock.

Grip! He felt himself seized in a masterful clutch from behind.

At the first clutch Joe's wind was shut off by that deadly hold on his throat.

Almost in the same second, squirming and fighting, the boy was lifted and carried over the threshold.

"Get him!" whispered Joe's captor to someone inside.

Click! That basement door closed behind them.

Other hands had seized the frightened boy, but held him as securely.

All in the dark Joe felt himself borne along for some distance over the floor, then down a long flight of steps to a sub-cellar.

Overhead a door closed, as Joe and his carrier descended.



"Got him?" called up an anxious voice from below that made Borden start.

"Yes," was the chuckling reply to Archbold's hail. "I gold-bricked him all right with the police uniform!"

Flare! Down in the sub-cellar a gas jet shot up its illuminating ray.

"Let him go now," urged the man in police uniform, who was following Joe's present carrier. "He can't get away. Nobody but us'll hear him if he yells way down here. He's safe and juggled."

Joe was put on his feet, white to the gills, but grit all the way through, despite the fatal odds against him.

"I want a good look at the boy," jeered Lawyer Archbold, stepping forward.

"So's to see if I'm the same one?" challenged our hero.

"The same one, impudence and all," gritted Archbold, then stood surveying the boy, with an evil smile.

"You've spoiled my game, so far, at every turn," snarled the lawyer. "But you never will again. The time has come to settle with you!"

"What's the grudge?" demanded Joe, audaciously.

"I can tell the full amount better," snapped Archbold, "when I find out whether you've got one thing that I want. Make the boy sit down," Archbold went on, turning to his two accomplices. "Get those shoes of his off."

"Oh, I'll take 'em off for you," proposed Joe, obligingly, dropping to a seat on a box near the lighted gas-jet.

"I suppose you would!" sneered Archbold. "You'd help willingly—and then, in a twinkling, tear up the very paper that I hope to find you are still carrying in one of your shoes!"

"Do you think I'd play tricks down here, Archbold, where you've got everything your own way?"

"I'm not going to give you any chance to, anyway," said the lawyer, cunningly. "Here, you men, take those shoes off for him—and be mighty careful that he doesn't get a chance to lay his fingers on anything that's in the shoes now."

With a sigh Joe leaned back against the wall, folding his arms.

"Archbold," he remarked, "I'm no squealer. The game is against me, and I've got sense enough to give up. Let your men help themselves to all that they find against me."

For an instant the lawyer regarded the boy suspiciously.

Yet Joe's face was so woe-begone in its look that the rascal concluded that he really had what he wanted to find close at hand.

"While these men are going through my shoes, Archbold," hinted the boy, drily, "you might as well be decent and enlighten my very natural curiosity on one point."

"Perhaps I will," jeered the lawyer.

"If this fellow of yours in uniform is only a fake policeman, how does he dare to walk the streets and chance running into other cops?"

"It's a little game my friends have just got up for themselves," smiled the lawyer. "One of my own invention, I may add. They have hired the basement above for pretended business. They also have this sub-cellar. Late at

night the one in uniform watches until the regular officer on the beat has gone by. Then he and the fake cop watch until some man comes along—one who looks half drunk works best—and they coax him down into the area-way. They get him down in the basement and go through him. Around here in the hotel district there's sometimes rich picking in the night time."

"What happens to the victim afterwards?" Joe demanded.

"Oh, he's drugged down here, slipped into a cab up in the street, driven off to some other place and dumped. When the victim comes to, he can't remember where the trick was done. This place has earned a few thousand dollars in the last two months."

"And you got the game up?"

"Yes."

"And have you an interest in it?"

"Oh, I get some of the profit from this, and from all of the games I start," replied Archbold, coolly.

"So that, while you pretend to be a lawyer, and yet never have a case in court, your real business is to launch crooks in new paths of crime?" demanded Joe, amazedly.

"Why, that summing-up describes my business rather well, I guess," smiled Archbold.

"Yet you live in a country town?"

"It's better to live away from the folks I deal through."

Joe's shoes were off by this time.

There was nothing in either of them.

"Off with the socks, too, then," directed Archbold.

Out of the right sock came a neatly-folded piece of paper upon which the lawyer pounced with an eager cry.

"This is the paper I lost—the paper you got from me!" cried Archbold, his face glowing dark red in his delight. "After all the trouble you've given me it has come back to me!"

"Now that you've won out," asked Joe, "are you going to be merciful?"

"That's a word we don't use much—my allies and I," rejoined the lawyer, smiling meaningly at his two henchmen.

"What are you going to do with me now?" asked Joe, in a voice of sudden alarm.

"What do you expect?"

"How should I know?"

"Guess!"

"Well, you may keep me prisoner here for a few days."

"Longer than that!"

"Why longer?" questioned Borden, quickly. "You've won. I couldn't beat you again now."

"I'm not so sure of that," rejoined Archbold. "At all events, I don't mean to take any chances."

"What then?"

"Borden, you've taken your last look at the world above you!"

Joe started to his feet, his lips quivering.

"Archbold, do you mean——?"

"Grab him!" ordered Archbold of the fake policeman.



Joe found it useless to struggle in the hands of that giant of strength.

"Lift the trap!" continued the lawyer, addressing his other henchman.

That fellow, gripping an iron ring that lay in the flooring, raised a trap-door some two feet in diameter.

Through the opening, as the fake policeman forced Joe to it, came a damp, offensive odor.

"Can you guess what it is?" asked Archbold, without feeling.

"A still deeper cellar?" quavered the boy.

"This hole," announced the lawyer, with evil coolness, "gives a ten-foot drop down into one of the big sewers of Chicago!"

Joe's hearing, acute to a degree in this awful peril, made out below the sound of moving water.

"If I can only land right down there, when they pitch me," groaned the young prisoner, inwardly, "I may be able to wade or swim to safety. Merciful heaven! What a place in which to be battling for life! Yet the chance is worth the hope!"

In the next instant Archbold dashed that hope.

"Bring the ropes and tie him!" ordered this arch fiend. "And the weight, too, so that he'll sink when he strikes the water down there. This troublesome youngster shall never bother me again."

Joe Borden was almost dazed with terror when he felt himself thrown to the floor.

His last hope of safety had been foreseen and cut off from him!

## CHAPTER XII.

### CONCLUSION.

Joe did not offer to struggle.

Where was the use? He was helpless, and knew it.

The numbness of despair was about his heart as he felt the last knots being tied over his wrists.

Then he felt these heartless scoundrels looping the rope over his bare angles.

"Seems too bad, doesn't it?" asked Archbold, softly, mockingly. "Yet you must remember, Borden, that you went into this lone-handed against men of experience. As one who has proved his gameness, of course you don't murmur now, at the last draw of cards."

Joe Borden did not answer. With the end of life at hand, talk seemed utterly senseless.

"We seem to have the folks here just where we want them!" rang a loud voice.

In an instant Joe's captors started up, well-nigh forgetting all about the boy.

Over there by the flaring gas-jet, at the foot of the cellar stairs, full half a dozen broad-shouldered men moved into sight.

Everyone of them had a revolver in his right hand.

Two, in addition, carried flash-lamps.

"You chaps over there will put your hands up quick, if you ever want to see as much as the sidewalk above!" rang

the dry, sharp command of the foremost of these newcomers. Right up, now!"

With no many glistening muzzles turned on them, even Archbold obeyed.

"Well, that's right now," approved the leader of the newcomers.

As rapidly as the thing could be done, handcuffs had been slipped over the wrists of the three prisoners.

"Had a case right on hand, did you?" nodded the leader, as one of his men bent over to free our hero. "A boy, at that! You took pretty small game sometimes, didn't you?"

"Police, I suppose?" questioned overjoyed Joe.

"The real, Simon-pure police, this time," laughed the officer in charge. "But how did they come to rope you in here, and what for? You're not intoxicated, like the people who usually form the game for this gang."

"I reckon you're asking for a good deal longer story than you've got time to listen to just now," replied Joe, sitting down on the floor to put on his shoes and stockings. "But you want to keep a particularly good eye on that tall chap. He's a pretended lawyer out at Blythe City, but he's an organizer for crooks on a big scale. I can tell you plenty about him. I wasn't a victim decoyed in here tonight to be robbed. I was gotten in here for the settling of a grudge."

"But you'll be robbed of one thing, now," jeered Archbold, harshly fixing his glittering, dark eyes on the boy's face. "Do you realize, Borden, that this story of the cipher key to that gold claim will get into all the papers now? The police will find that paper on me. The reporters will copy it and print it. The secret that you've fought so hard to save will be telegraphed all over the country within the next few hours!"

"Archbold," laughed the boy, "let the reporters print the information on that piece of paper as widely as they care to. It won't hurt anyone, or do anyone any good. Are you fool enough to suppose that it's the right slip. It's one that I fixed up, in case I ever fell into your hands, or those of your crew. The real paper? Beth Bronson and I committed to memory the contents of the real paper. Then we burned it!"

Leaving two of their number behind to search the place, the rest of the police now took their prisoners to the nearest police station.

Joe was obliged to go along, as a witness, but was released later on, by frankly telling all about himself and promising to be on hand for the trial.

It was full daylight when Joe, somewhat sleepy, at last, stepped in through the entrance of the hotel once more.

For an hour or more, Joe slept in his room, with a well-tipped porter standing by as guard.

Then the porter roused Joe, who, after a bath, sent to Beth's room to learn if she would join him at breakfast.

Beth would, and did. Yet, hungry as she was, she almost forgot to eat while Joe unfolded that wonderful story of the night's doings.

Then, later, they were conveyed to the lawyer's office.



Proceedings for a change of guardian for Beth were instituted at once.

Mrs. Underwood, who attempted to leave the city for parts unknown, was watched by detectives and prevented from getting away.

Soon after it was discovered that she had embezzled at least fifty thousand dollars, or a quarter of her former ward's fortune.

That faithless woman is now in prison.

Archbold got there, too, at last, and it will be another twenty years before he has any chance to see life beyond prison walls.

Stokes escaped the law, for lack of proof, but punished himself in his own way by drinking himself to death.

Barrows was killed in a railroad accident. The pair of scoundrels, who had done their best to kill Joe at Mrs. Bliss's house turned footpads soon after.

In holding up one citizen, their victim put up such a fight that he had to be shot.

The yeggmen have been lost in the shuffle.

Doubtless they have been caught elsewhere, and have gone the way of the transgressor.

Lawyer Edgerton, who handled Beth's case for her, was finally appointed her new guardian, at the girl's request.

When the decks were clear again, for new action, Joe put into operation his plan for securing that unlocated Colorado mining-claim for Beth.

Lawyer Edgerton supplied a trustworthy man to act as a "dummy."

The lawyer and his wife, Beth and Joe, accompanied by the "dummy," made a vacation trip to Colorado.

There, after some traveling through rough country, they found the claim.

It was even richer than it had been reported to be. To-day it is one of the most productive mines in Colorado.

The man who served as "dummy" located the claim in his own name.

Then, through Lawyer Edgerton, this "dummy" deeded the mine to Beth, in trust for her when she should reach the age of eighteen, which she has just done.

And Joe?

For the next few months, his craze both for travel and for adventure seemed to be fully satisfied.

Then, at last, the longing for one more good round of the wide world came strongly upon him.

He called upon Beth.

"I'm getting restless," he told her. "Since we came back from the Colorado trip, I hardly know what to do. For a while I came near buying a trunk, looking for a job, and settling down."

"Looking for a job?" laughed Beth. "With all the cash that my guardian is going to allow you for having helped me to save the mine to myself. What do you want a position for?"

"I did want it, for the sake of having something to occupy my mind," Joe replied, sheepishly. "But I don't want it any longer. I've just made up my mind to pack my hat

full of head and start off again over the wide world. I leave to-morrow, go to New York, sail for France, and from there I don't know just where the trip will take me."

"Will it bring you around and back to Chicago, later on?" asked Beth, rather soberly.

"That's one of the things I've come to see you about, dear girl. Now, Chicago is a bully good place, while you're here. But you've no idea, Beth, how gloomy Chicago would seem if you weren't here. See here, Beth, suppose, after this next trip, I come back ready to settle down? Would you help make the town pleasant for a reformed traveler?"

"I always try to."

"But would you do it in the only way, Beth? For I shall never really stop living in my hat until I marry."

"If I say yes, you'll settle down and give up roaming?"

"Cross my heart, dear girl!"

"I had always hoped that, if I married, Joe, my husband would take me roaming a bit with him."

"Well, that's just what I mean," promised the young man, eagerly, as he caught one of her hands between his two. "Marry me, Beth, when I get back from this trip, and after that I'll quit roaming—alone."

It was not really hard to get Beth to agree.

"For I don't really know any one I want, except you," she laughed, just before he kissed her.

Joe was gone six weeks on that trip.

A few weeks after that he and Beth were married, by the consent of Beth's guardian.

Then, for the first time in his life, this world-wise youngster traveled with a trunk—two of his own, in fact, and several of his bride's.

"Which way is the best fun in traveling?" asked Beth, one day.

"Guess!" was Joe's cautious answer.

## THE END.

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